

LUTHERAN EDUCATION



LUTHERAN EDUCATION

VOLUME 143, NO. 2

CONTENTS

VOLUME 143, NO. 2

Focus on:

- 76 To Our Readers
- 87 The Widget Effect: A New Educational Term for an Old Educational Problem
- 98 Forgiving “Unforgivable” Injustices: A Lutheran Interpretation of the Processes of Interpersonal Forgiveness
- 112 Christians in the Hipster Subculture: What Does the Gospel have to do with Skinny Jeans, Irony, and Indie Bands?
- 121 The Call and the Will of God

February 2010

LUTHERAN EDUCATION JOURNAL
CONCORDIA
UNIVERSITY
CHICAGO
1864
7400 AUGUSTA STREET
RIVER FOREST, ILLINOIS 60305-1499

Periodical Postage Paid
Nappanee, IN 46550



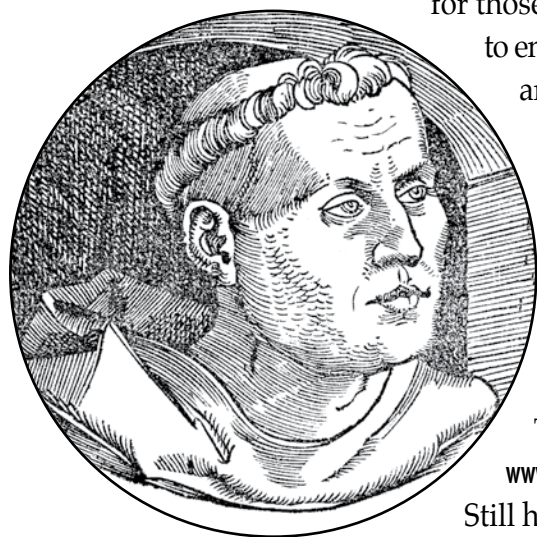
CONCORDIA
UNIVERSITY
CHICAGO

Inspiring faith, learning and leadership.®



NEW ONLINE PROGRAM: Master of Arts, Religion (MAR)

Earn your online degree from an institution with a reputation for quality, excellence and integrity.



The MAR program at CUC is an ideal way for those who work within the Church to enhance their theological knowledge and expertise, and for those individuals wishing to enrich their understanding of the Bible and Christian theology.

For more information about CUC's online **Master of Arts in Religion**, visit us at www.CUChicago.edu/MAR.

To apply online, go to www.CUChicago.edu/GradApply.

Still have questions? Contact the Office of Graduate Admission and Enrollment Services at (708) 209-4093 or e-mail Grad.Admission@CUChicago.edu.

Were you at LEA in 2008?

Do you look forward to the next convocation in 2011?



Crossing Over

March 24-26, 2011
Cincinnati, Ohio

We'll see you there...but you don't have to wait for LEA's other benefits. Enjoy them now at www.lea.org.

Registration opens in August 2010.

For information and registration materials & updates visit:
www.lea.org/convocation2011/index.htm

Lutheran Education Association...a professional organization that links, equips, and affirms educators in Lutheran ministries.

Lutheran Education Association
7400 Augusta Street
River Forest, IL 60305
708.209.3343

Lutheran Education

Published Since 1865 by the Faculty of

Concordia University Chicago

Volume 143; Number 2

Publisher:

Dr. John F. Johnson, President
Concordia University Chicago, River Forest, Ill.

Editor:

O. John Zillman, Department of Psychology

Contributing Editor:

Ed Grube, Lutheran Education Association

Associate Editors:

H. Robert Hayes, Department of History and
Political Science

William Duey, Department of Human
Performance

General Editor:

Peter E. Pohlhammer

Graphics:

Denise Jacob

Regular Departments:

Go...and Teach!

Jane Buerger, Professor of Mathematics

DCE Expressions

Debra Arfsten, DCE Program Director

Administrative Talk

Glen Kuck, St. Paul Lutheran School, Chicago, Ill.

Today's Lutheran Educator

Jonathan Laabs, Executive Director,
Lutheran Education Association

Secondary Sequence

Kevin Dunning Executive Director, Faith Lutheran
Junior and Senior High School, Las Vegas, NV

Multiplying Ministries

Richard Bimler, past president of Wheat Ridge
Ministries and Ambassador of Health, Hope, and
Aging for Lutheran Life Communities.

Cover Design:

Del Klaustermeier

Lutheran Education Journal (ISSN 002407488) is published four times per year. Subscriptions are \$10 a year, and are available from *Lutheran Education Journal*, Concordia University Chicago, 7400 Augusta St., River Forest, IL 60305-1402. Periodical postage paid at Nappanee, IN.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Lutheran Education Journal*, 7400 Augusta St., River Forest, IL 60405-1402.

Lutheran Education Journal is available on microfilm. Write to University Microfilms, North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48103. Printed in USA.

Lutheran Education Journal has been selected as the professional journal of the Lutheran Education Association (LEA). Members of the LEA receive the journal as part of membership benefits. Inquiries regarding membership may be addressed to LEA, 7400 Augusta St., River Forest, IL 60305-1402. The *Journal* and LEA remain independent entities.

In This Issue.

87 The Widget Effect: A New Educational Term for an Old Educational Problem

A central problem confronting the appraisal rating system of teachers is that their effectiveness—the most important factor in the improvement of student learning—is not measured, recorded, or used to inform decision-making in any meaningful way. The author examines a recent national study which highlights the problem with its findings as well as important questions left unanswered.

by Tim Mizelle

98 Forgiving “Unforgivable” Injustices: A Lutheran Interpretation of the Processes of Interpersonal Forgiveness

Whether serving the Church or not, individuals are often vulnerable to situations in which forgiveness is difficult and questions such as “What did I do to deserve this?” arise. These reach into the very core of one’s sense of a place in the world and often result in deep and lasting emotional injury. The author examines the process of moving from “walking wounded” to the peace that can only derive from placing Christ’s sacrifice at the center of the hurt.

by Henry Corcoran

112 Christians in the Hipster Subculture: What Does the Gospel have to do with Skinny Jeans, Irony, and Indie Bands?

The hipster aesthetic including piercings, listening to vinyl records and riding fixed-gear bicycles has gone mainstream and has also entered the Christian tradition in the form of what might be called “Christian hipsters,” those who participate in both the Christian tradition and the hipster “lifestyle.” What, if anything, does this bring to the ongoing engagement between religion and culture? The authors here share research originally presented at the 2009 conference of the Association of Lutheran College Faculties.

by Courtney Wilder and Jeremy Rehwaldt-Alexander

121 The Call and the Will of God

We who are Called to serve daily confront our own relationship with the work that God places before us, a crucial part of which is helping His people understand the “Why?” of their own lives and their relationship with God. In this last print-on-paper issue of the *Journal*, we re-publish here the author’s iconic study of the essence of what we do as servant leaders in the Church.

by Russell Moulds

Departments

76 To Our Readers

O. John Zillman

79 Here I Sit ... Unsynchronized

O. John Zillman

134 Go ... And Teach! Our Wonderful Students – Part 2

Jane Buerger

139 DCE Expressions ... Running in Place

Kevin Hall

142 Administrative Talk ... Real Work

Glen Kuck

145 Today's Lutheran Educator ... A Time for Transition

Jonathan Laabs

148 Multiplying Ministries ... An Encouraging Word!

Rich Bimler

To Our Readers

In the early summer of 2009, it became evident that it was time for a change in how the *Lutheran Education Journal* would be formatted, published and distributed. In part, this was driven by some financial considerations but, on the whole, the idea had been circulating for some time prior to that. In a series of conversations with our editorial and communications staff, the executive staff of the Lutheran Education Association—which also included a poll of its members—and with Dr. John Johnson, President of Concordia University Chicago and Publisher of the Journal, the decision was made that this publication would transition to a wholly Web-based format. The issue that you are reading will be the last to be published in the present print-on-paper form; the target for the roll-out of the web version is set for spring of 2010.

Part of the consideration was a pragmatic solution to the problem of cost and in demonstrating fiscal responsibility from the standpoint of both CUC and LEA. The longstanding partnership between the university and LEA continues to be strong however the realities of respective “bottom lines” would have resulted in a significant curtailment of publication in the present format. While some upfront costs will be incurred, the move to the online format will allow the publication to continue with a much lower price tag attached. While we recognize that there will be certain tradeoffs, we believe that the transition will add tremendous versatility, timeliness, scope and will greatly enlarge the readership of the Journal.

Some advantages:

The *Journal*, as a Web publication of the faculty of Concordia University Chicago, will benefit from the expertise of the university’s Web site and technical staff in a style and format that complements existing CUC web publications, such as “The Forester”—but with its own unique features.

The *Journal* will be an open access Web resource without password restrictions or subscriptions for the general reader. The greatest of these

will be the “google effect”—hits on a website from anyone searching for particular key-word information in Web browsers—which will enlarge the reach of the Journal to students, researchers and professional educators of any background who are interested in what will remain as our major themes: Christian education, church-related ministries to young people and adults, faith-based values and professional support for those who are affiliated with parochial schools with parallel missions. We have always believed that Lutheran educators have much to offer the education profession at large.

The “Volume/Issue” format has as its purpose the arrangement of periodicals on a bookshelf but also imposes limits on page length and arrangement in order for a publication to be printed on paper at the most economical rate. A web journal has significantly fewer constraints. It remains to be seen what the “industry standard” will be for organizing current and archived electronic materials but the greatest advantage will be that the *Journal* can be in nearly continuous “publication” with new articles added on a rolling basis with date of posting as the point of reference.

The web version will allow categorization of article topics to be navigated at the option of the user. There are plans afoot to expand these with the addition of site sections anchored in several academic departments at Concordia University Chicago. At present, these include Foundations, Social Policy and Research, DCE ministry, Music Education and Theology. We will, of course, continue to focus on Teacher Education with contributions by our own faculty members as well as others within the Concordia University System. In addition, we intend to invite articles from professionals in the greater realm of education as the interests of Lutheran, other parochial and public educators and researchers intersect. The needs are so great and the challenges so daunting in providing excellence in education for *all* children that we would be remiss if we didn’t exchange the best of ideas with these colleagues.

Finally, the reader will continue to benefit from the thinking of those regular columnists who bring support, ideas, humor and reflection to our shared ministries. We will continue to post columns related to DCE ministry, educational servant/leadership, the Lutheran Teacher as an educational minister, Lutheran Secondary Education and those which encourage us to “multiply our ministries” until they are filled to the brim, pressed down and running over. The blessings of Lutheran Education for children, young people, their families and those who serve them will continue to be our focus, centered in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As we make the change, we ask for the patience that these ventures inevitably require. It's my pledge to you that the quality and professional value of the *Lutheran Education Journal*—the oldest continuously published education journal in North America—will continue as they have since 1864.

This is going to be good... *LEJ*

In His Service,

O. John Zillman, Editor

John.Zillman@CUChicago.edu

Here I Sit ... Unsynchronized

by O. John Zillman

The weekend after Thanksgiving, I took a giant technological leap. After walking around with the same cell phone for about six years, I finally traded up to a 3G network “smart phone.” So as to avoid the appearance of product endorsement here, I’ll just say that the new one is of the type that rhymes with “blackberry.” Most importantly, I had waited long enough that the phone, er, the “handheld device” itself was free.

The old one actually worked fine but I was tired of people—especially The Daughters—making fun of me. I had only stored about twenty numbers in it and I it used as...a phone. Its ring tone even sounded like an old rotary dial bell which I thought less intrusive than, say, the “NFL Today” theme if by chance I’d forget to turn it off in a meeting or the classroom. I think I had sent maybe two text messages over that amount of time because it had three or four letters on each key which required shifting around the alphabet for each, a process which took deFmnOpRdEtuVdEpR. Although my fingers are too big for the tiny keys, I’m liking the full QWERTY keyboard and am noticing better muscle tone in my thumbs.

It took a couple of days to figure things out. The best part of that was when I took the new phone to my friend Lou who is one of the tech whiz kids who work in the CougarNet center on Concordia’s campus. Within ten minutes, he had my CUC email account and the web browser all set up. The email is especially handy as I can just press the left side bar and my messages instantly appear. The web browser, well, not so much: the screen is so small that the image of a full web page is rather like the view through a keyhole. (I’m sure it will come in handy when at some point Chicago Bears scores are worth checking again.) I was like a kid with, well, a new cell phone and for the first couple of evenings at home, was checking my email every fifteen minutes or so. I’ve even just pulled it out while walking down a hallway here—even though I’d just checked my email in the office five minutes before—just so I’d feel Important

and so maybe a few students would see that I'd finally advanced into the second decade of the 21st Century. (Did I mention that the upgrade was free?)

What could be better? Well, I'll tell you what: the calendar. I've long since moved to keeping track of all of my important work and family dates on my laptop. My "Daytimer" is now just a leather-bound repository for out of date phone numbers, old receipts and business cards for service managers at car dealerships. But NOW, I can set all of my course meeting times, committee meetings, social events, birthdays, university calendar info, etc., on my laptop (or the phone) and at the end of the day, just open the desktop manager, click once and watch the device and the laptop exchange, verify and synchronize information so that each has *exactly* the same information on it. The next step is for my wife to get her calendar all set up in her new (free) "blackberry" and we can synchronize our schedules *without even speaking to each other!*

Whoa. Wait a minute. This doesn't seem quite right. While we do occasionally have spirited conversations about calendars, dates and priorities as I'm sure occur in most two-career marriages, just exchanging information through a USB connection won't get at the meanings, intentions or necessities of setting some things as priorities, maintaining obligations, traditions (or, on occasion, to serve as an indication that it's time to just chuck it all out and do something spontaneous). But everything will be accurate, will match exactly and when the synchronization is finished, one could conceivably be unable to tell the source of any one entry in this neat, clean, efficient and exact duplication process.

It occurs to me that there exists in education the view that this should be the way in which children learn. Children's minds should duplicate the teacher's mind which should duplicate the material that will appear on a standardized test which should duplicate external standards. One could segue here into a treatise on standardized testing but that's not exactly where I'm going with this.

It's my guess that most Lutheran schools are not under the same pressures as are educators in the public sector to demonstrate progress mandated under the requirements of No Child Left Behind. Achievement tests have their uses and, when kept in proper perspective, can be rather helpful in helping to make decisions for children, which is their real purpose.

On the other hand, all Lutheran teachers at any level are "teachers of the faith." How do we know how students are doing in that?

From a curricular and assessment perspective, this can be measured by the degree to which the child has absorbed Lutheran doctrine. “Indoctrination” is essentially a good thing when defined as and applied to setting in a child the foundations of the Christian faith: their Baptism, Scripture, catechetical knowledge and some sense of why Lutherans are Lutheran especially later on when children are ready to undertake preparation for full adult participation in Holy Communion. Most important in this from the teaching standpoint is what Dr. Ken Heinitz taught many of us here, specifically that every religion lesson should point a child or young person to the Resurrection. As the child grows, “indoctrination” develops into a sense of living “in doctrine.”

I think it’s useful to use the term “indoctrination”—up to a point. Certainly children from infancy through adolescence derive great advantage from Lutheran teachers who faithfully use good, developmentally sound practice in presenting the tenets of the Christian faith. At some level, though, I think there is wisdom in considering the notion that, into young adulthood and onward from there, individuals will construct—or the Spirit will construct within them—an individuated faith which is as unique as the soul of the person in which it lodges. (See the article in this issue by Courtney Wilder and Jeremy Rehwaladt-Alexander.) The saying that “curriculum is what happens” is an immense understatement when teaching the faith.

From another angle, though, this “curricular” question can also take on another layer, that is, what might be described as the degree of the “orthodoxy” of the approach. Should teachers use “praise songs” in chapel or, should students learn Lutheran hymnody alone? Should multi-ethnic schools incorporate music and practices such as personal testimonies which are going to sound familiar to a student whose “home church” isn’t Lutheran? What about gospel music or Spanish language songs? Or should African-American and Latino students sing Christmas carols only in English...or German? I’ve seen it done both ways. What about communion instruction? Should that happen in 7th and 8th grade confirmation class or can it be separated out and taught earlier as part of the stream of religious curriculum leading to Confirmation? Should female teachers lead all-student devotions or chapel in Lutheran high schools? Some do; some don’t. The list of possible variations goes on and on.

Making those decisions between pastors, principals, teachers, DCEs and others who are responsible for religious education must result in a curriculum and practice that is educationally sound and faithful to

God's Word. There are those, however, who would very much prefer that religious instruction be analogous to the "USB Synchronization" paradigm I've described. Pastors, teachers, students and their parents and families should all be "synchronized" so that what each person knows and believes and the way in which everyone worships are all exactly the same as everybody else. Moreover, that view should be extended to all Lutheran schools and congregations as "correct." Those who may disagree or who may have a thoughtful yet faithful variation which effectively connects to the student would not be considered "orthodox."

Orthodoxy, itself, is defined as "conforming to established doctrine, especially in religion" according to my friend, Webster. It seems to me that the key word there isn't "established doctrine" but, rather, "conforming." Who decides who is conforming and how far does that extend? Does it apply to teaching which conforms to the established doctrines in Lutheranism, essentially Scripture and the Confessions which we all promised to uphold when we were installed and commissioned? No argument there: it's a public vow that is taken seriously, a three way agreement in which the worker agrees to uphold what the Church believes and teaches, the Calling body that trusts the worker to do it and God who blesses the efforts of both.

But what about when conforming and trust get into areas other than actual doctrine? Can claims be made that because a teacher of the church engages ideas which emanate from essentially secular sources, people or controversies that are difficult, which don't have easy answers or which exist in gray areas, that "orthodoxy" applies to these, too? If so, we've departed from doctrine into other areas in which the expectation of absolute conformity may not apply or simply won't solve much. The useful "USB Synchronization" by which Scripture and Confessions unite common faith and understanding can also be extrapolated into the agendas of individuals or groups and easily devolve into points of division instead.

When the term "orthodox" is applied in this way, it departs from its doctrinal connection and is used to externally define a person on the basis of their ideas or associations as are judged fit to be "right minded" thinking—according to the group establishing (or extrapolating) the standard of approval. Further, according to this interpretation, no one who deviates from those agendas will, by even the keenest scholarship or insight, ever be able to make a convincing argument that there's another way to think. Responding to anything written—even in self-defense—just brings bad things down on one's head as reasoned argumentation

will never supersede guilt by association or expressed thought, typically without the benefit of context.

Here's an example. During my doctoral program at the University of Illinois at Chicago in the 1990s, I decided along with my advisor that I would write a qualitative dissertation rather than one based on statistical analysis of a problem: narrative analysis suits my intellect and talents more closely. So, when it was time to take the course sequence in this sort of research, the name on the course timetable was "W. Ayers." Yep, one and the same William Ayers who, in the 2008 Presidential election became a lightning rod for challenges to the qualifications of Barack Obama. If one took Qualitative Analysis, well, Bill Ayers taught the course. I have to say that, at the time, I had little or no idea of Dr. Ayers' personal history but through conversations with other students, I learned that his has certainly been an unconventional life and that he had rather radical political affiliations in his younger years, the details of which found their way into the various versions of what passed for "discourse" on the matter during the campaign. I will not revisit them here.

On the other hand, in the two courses that I took with him, he and I came to understand that we differed in our orientation to education and I will say here that as I brought up ideas in class that were centered in Christianity, he was completely respectful of my thinking and writing. He made no demands on his students that they adopt his worldview—he only required that we read carefully, think deeply and be willing to accept constructive criticism of our writing.

But if one holds to the "USB Synchronization" paradigm, I must have emerged from that experience as "brainwashed" damaged goods, unfit for a faculty position at Concordia much less as a Called Lutheran Teacher. Far-fetched? Just read some of the Web-sites and blogs out there. No, my name isn't mentioned that I'm aware of because this, right here, would be news to those who have "discovered" in plain sight the names of other CUC faculty members who have a similar connection to William Ayers—as his former students. I guess the assumption is that if one comes into contact with nonconformist ideas or people that one's strength of character, intellectual capacity and critical judgment just evaporate and that one "synchronizes" with the new set of ideas. It's as though all of one's prior learning was so loosely attached that it would just fall away like damaged plaster under the influence of, in this instance, Ayers' leftist leanings. People don't learn new ideas this way. If they did, teaching would be a very simple task indeed.

Actually his classes weren't what anyone would call subversive—but they were focused on topics that should make any educator with a conscience feel uncomfortable: children in ineffective schools, crushing poverty, racial discrimination and injustice. We read searing qualitative accounts of hopeless and forgotten people in America. We fumbled around with our writing while attempting to find our own voices in what we thought we'd be doing later in our theses. It was good company, intellectually challenging and, for one who thought he was a pretty fair writer already, a humbling experience.

As for my exposure to his own writing, Ayers' first book, *The Good Pre-School Teacher*¹ remains one of the more popular loaners from my office bookshelf to my Concordia students. It's about...ready for this?... good pre-school teachers. Another of his books, *Teacher Lore*² co-edited by UIC colleague, William Schubert, was where I began to understand that the culture and ethos in a school is created largely through what teachers regard as important values, a theme that I've followed repeatedly in these pages where Lutheran teachers are concerned.

Ayers accorded us the kind of academic freedom that really comes only with accepting the academic responsibility for what one writes to begin with—because we were going to have to defend it, literally—and remains one of the most interesting people I've ever met. He influenced my thinking, research and writing, not my politics or my faith, which is exactly what we'd both bargained for at the beginning as professor and graduate student. Other than that, the only difference in me is that when the whole thing came up in the media during the presidential campaign, I could say, "Hey, I've met *both* of those guys, Bill Ayers *and* Barack Obama" (which is another story for another time).

So, if someone wants to pin a label on me now—as if I'm a different person than I was before I wrote this piece—I suppose they can. But, as Carl Jung is purported to have said, "I'm glad I'm Jung and not a 'Jungian' so I can still change my mind." Wise thinking. "Lutheran Teacher" is the label I use for myself because that's my office (and "doctor" because I earned the right to do so). Beyond that, I want to be able to hold different, even opposite, ideas in my head at the same time to show my students that this is possible and that people do it all the time although they may not be aware of it. After all, they've been taught through high school that finding right answers is really important but now at

1. Teachers College Press, New York, 1989

2. Longman Publishing Group, White Plains, NY, 1992

the university level, we're going to carefully examine the questions, too. Reading, writing, and thinking deeply about a question—in a theory, a piece of controversial literature or a thorny social problem—should be a major part of what we're about in Christian higher education and the result should be that one should be able to think for oneself and make up one's own mind. Imagine that.

Universities and seminaries of the Church can be the catalysts for thought and the repositories of collective conscience for the Church, as well. Those who tell us now that our Concordia students—all adults—should only learn *this* and not think about or be exposed to *that* should be reminded that the Reformation grew out of Luther's scholarship and deep thinking, that his ideas didn't come to him pre-formed and that he and others of his day disagreed in their approach to their common disagreement with the Roman Church. The term "academic freedom" is bandied about as though it were mere license and can exist in the absence of "academic responsibility" and that tenure is something to hide behind rather than what it is: a measure of mutual trust, that a faculty member understands and will espouse the mission of the place and to a degree, the institution will respect the occasional well-reasoned divergence of viewpoint.

The perfunctory pinning of labels on each other—liberal, moderate, conservative, Confessional, orthodox, etc. (reverse the order if you'd like)—is the equivalent of setting out ideological glue traps, those things we put under the kitchen sink this time of year to solve the problem of unwelcome critters. While it's difficult to know what a mouse thinks, I'm rather certain that those caught aren't content with their predicament. It's not the purpose of the trap to keep the mouse from getting into bigger trouble; it's to make it struggle until it stops struggling. If workers in the Church aren't careful, they can get caught, too, from either direction. And they can't escape no matter what, no matter how well-intentioned they may be. It's not the mouse; it's those who set out the traps, who hide them in seemingly innocuous places where they wait until...Gotcha! My concern here is for the many colleagues who, over the years, have left professional church work including CUS university faculties because they either feared or had had a bellyful of the "gotcha" games and chose to stop struggling.

A fallen Creation sets out enough traps for us that we could do without them as a way of labeling each other within the Church. But that doesn't mean that there isn't any value in talking with each other about when and where some very sticky situations might be encountered.

As I see it—and as I was taught here—doctrine is supposed to be a map, not a trap. And, if maps are to remain effective, they need to be examined and perhaps re-drawn once in a while in careful and faithful ways. Each generation of thinkers and workers in the Church has the potential freedom, tempered by responsibility, to come up with new ways of helping believers and non-believers to understand the Good News and how the joy of living and believing is expressed, strengthened and operationalized in one's life and relationships with God and other people. I see some of these minds at work in my own classroom, as fully “synchronized” in Lutheran doctrine as young people can be but who are asking questions that are worth examining. As we strive to create a place in which it's safe to ask those questions, they start to find contentment with the label “student” which is a major prerequisite for acquiring the title of “teacher” of any kind.

When I think about it, my new “handheld device” is one of the only parts of my life that is really synchronized most of the time and it only happens when I remember to do it, never just on its own. As for the rest, I prefer to understand that while God has me solidly in his loving grasp, any struggling that I do has more purpose for me than I would dare to ascribe to or blame on the struggles of another believer. It was, after all, Adam and Eve's ill-advised attempt to demand “synchronization” with God that started the whole mess to begin with and, although this still seems to be very much a part of our human nature, perhaps we could stop attempting to do that to each other as well. It can only happen by genuinely reflecting God's grace. That's free, too. *LEJ*

John Zillman, Editor, *may be contacted at john.zillman@cuchicago.edu.*

The Widget Effect: A New Educational Term for an Old Educational Problem

by Tim Mizelle

Consider the following two teachers from the same school district that utilizes a binary performance evaluation system. At various times during the school year, the principal or principal's designee visits the classroom and observes teaching performance. Following the formal visit to the classroom, the teacher is rated as "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory."

Mr. Smith is a social studies teacher at one of the high schools in the district. He teaches most of the world history and geography classes from general tracked classes to college prep classes. His students are quiet and attentive to the lecture, the teaching methodology used most of the time by Mr. Smith. Students seldom take notes during the lecture because, as one student said, "everything is in the book we need to know for tests." With eleven years of experience, Mr. Smith has command of the subject and presents it in an organized manner. He sometimes supplements his lectures with PowerPoint presentations. When observed by the principal in a recent evaluation, Mr. Smith received a rating of "satisfactory."

Ms. Jones is a veteran science teacher of seven years at one of the middle schools in the district. She teaches most of the life sciences for 8th grade students. Her classes range from the general track to the college prep. Ms. Jones uses a variety of teaching methodologies, including lecture, small group discussion, lab experiments, brain teasers, crossword puzzles, Socratic question and answer, and games using a lock-out buzzer system. Her students are deeply involved in the learning process, constantly asking questions and adding to the discussion with comments. Having attended numerous conferences in her area, Ms. Jones is always seeking new methods of teaching to make learning fun and teaching interesting. The students are excited about the subject and seem to look forward to every class. When observed by the principal in a recent evaluation, Ms. Jones received a rating of "satisfactory."

Both teachers by any system of measurement are "satisfactory" teachers by any appraisal process. The students are learning as a result

teacher efforts, even though one teacher is clearly the better teacher. If students were asked as to whom was the better teacher, the answer would no doubt be “Ms. Jones” by most respondents. Even a novice to the observation system would easily conclude that Ms. Jones is more actively involved in the teaching process utilizing a variety of teaching methods for student participation. Yet, when formally evaluated as to the effectiveness of their teaching performance, both teachers received a “satisfactory” rating with no indication of greater effectiveness between the two teachers. Clearly, both teachers are “satisfactory” teachers within their own system of instruction. Even if the district utilized a trinary rating of “good,” “fair,” or “poor,” both Mr. Smith and Ms. Jones would probably be evaluated as “good” teachers.

Therein is the problem that confronts the appraisal rating system of teachers, and it is a serious problem at the national level. A teacher’s effectiveness—the most important factor in the improvement of student learning—is not measured, recorded, or used to inform decision-making in any meaningful way. When a parent asks a school district executive as to the quality of teachers who will be teaching their child, the executive leadership cannot tell the parent the degree of effectiveness of teachers who will be teaching their child. The measurable data is not present to separate the “satisfactory” teacher from the “unsatisfactory” teacher or the “good” teacher” from a “fair” teacher. This is known as “the widget effect” where teachers are treated like interchangeable parts, or widgets.

Educators often wonder why merit pay plans have not worked more effectively. On paper, the merit pay proposals seem to be an answer to a national problem facing the educational community. Provide teachers with extra money as an incentive for increased student performance; however, when the theory of merit pay turns into realistic practice, educators are left scratching their heads and wondering why the merit pay plan did not do as premised on paper. Maybe the answer rests in the “widget effect.”

Even though the term “widget effect” was not specifically referenced by President Barack Obama in a March 10, 2009, speech on education to the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the basic premise of the widget effect permeates his comments. President Obama said, “Let me be clear. If a teacher is given a chance, or two chances, or three chances, and still does not improve, there is no excuse for that person to continue teaching. I reject a system that rewards failure and protects a person from its consequences. The stakes are too high. We can afford nothing but the best when it comes to our children’s teachers and to the schools where they teach.”

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan was more specific as to the seriousness of the widget effect when he addressed the National Education Association in July, 2009. Secretary Duncan said, “These policies were created over the past century to protect the rights of teachers but they have produced an industrial factory model of education that treats all teachers like interchangeable widgets. It’s time we all admit that just as our testing system is deeply flawed, so is our teacher evaluation system—and the losers are not just the children. When great teachers are unrecognized and unrewarded, when struggling teachers are unsupported, and when failing teachers are unaddressed, the teaching profession is damaged.”

Perhaps an editorial in the June 10, 2009, edition of *The New York Times* says it best when the editor writes, “Education reform will go nowhere until the states are forced to revamp corrupt teacher evaluation systems that rate a vast majority of teachers as ‘excellent,’ even in schools where children learn nothing.”

On Monday, June 1, 2009, The New Teacher Project released *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*. This organization was founded by teachers in 1997 to address teacher issues and serves as a non-profit organization which partners with educational entities to increase the number of outstanding teachers. The report is the product of an extensive research effort spanning 12 districts and four states—Colorado, Arkansas, Illinois, and Ohio. It reflects survey responses from teachers and administrators. It has benefited from the insight of local and state education officials, teacher union leaders, policymakers, and advocates who participated in advisory panels in each state. The four states selected for the study employ diverse teacher performance management policies. The 12 districts studied range in size, geographic location, evaluation policies and practices, and overall approaches to teacher performance management systems. The smallest district studied was the Jonesboro Public Schools in Arkansas, serving approximately 4,450 students. The largest district studied was Chicago Public Schools in Illinois, serving approximately 413,700 students. All 12 districts employ some type of formal evaluation process for teachers, but the methods and frequency of evaluation differ; however, the outcomes are strikingly similar, as noted later in this article (Keeling, D., Mulhern, J. et al, 2009).

Specifically, 15,176 teachers were surveyed in the study from a high of 7,482 teachers in Illinois to a low of 2,196 teachers in Arkansas. In terms of principals, a total of 1,281 were surveyed from a high of 794 in Illinois to a low of 117 in Arkansas. In terms of former teachers, a total

of 798 were surveyed from a high of 334 in Colorado to a low of 227 in both Illinois and Ohio. Former teachers in Arkansas were not reported in the data collection. In terms of interviews, a total of 136 were conducted from a high of 41 in Ohio to a low of 23 in Colorado. The interviews were conducted with some combination of teachers, principals, local teacher union leaders, local principal professional organization leaders, district human resources staff, legal counsel, and school board members (Keeling, D., Mulhern, J. et al, 2009).

Through the use of mixed-methods, the report concludes that the evaluation practices currently in use are fundamentally flawed and indefensible. The extraordinary lack of variation across districts paints a portrait of teacher evaluation yielding inaccurate findings of equal effectiveness and universal competence. The Widget report chronicles flaws in the ways in which teacher evaluation is conducted in the 12 districts studied. The report additionally asserts that while teacher evaluation systems espouse lofty goals to improve practice, the data suggest just the opposite. The process of teacher evaluation is so entangled in due process negotiations and minimal standards of “do no harm” that evaluation is often perfunctory and devalued (Keeling, D., Mulhern, J. et al, 2009).

The findings of the New Teacher Project 2009 are alarming. In essence, teachers are treated as interchangeable parts, or widgets. For example, all teachers are rated “good” or “great.” Although teachers and principals report that poor performance is common, less than 1 percent of teachers are identified as “unsatisfactory” on performance evaluations. An additional finding reveals that excellence goes unrecognized. When excellent ratings are the norm, truly exceptional teachers cannot be formally identified, nor can they be compensated, promoted, or retained. The report reveals that professional development is inadequate. Almost 3 in 4 teachers did not receive any specific feedback on improving their performance in the last evaluation. The report suggests that novice teachers are often neglected. Low expectations for beginning teachers translate into benign neglect in the classroom and a toothless tenure process. These novice teachers appeared to receive no special attention; in fact, 66% of novice teachers are rated superior and 76% are very confident that they will receive tenure after the probationary period has ended. Poor performance goes unaddressed. Half of the 12 districts have not dismissed a single non-probationary teacher for poor performance in the past five years. No district dismisses more than a few teachers each year, if any at all. It is alarming that something as important as

evaluations are to the teaching-learning process, most teacher evaluation systems are based on 2 or fewer observations totaling about 75 minutes and 59% of probationary teachers were observed 2 times or fewer. Based on the flaws in evaluation systems as presented in the report, it is not surprising that judgments of teacher quality are made primarily on the basis of longevity and credentialing rather than on instructional quality (Keeling, D., Mulhern, J. et al, 2009).

When multiple ratings are available, teachers tend to be assigned to the highest ratings and are rarely assigned poor ratings. For example, in the Akron Public Schools for the 05-06 school year to the 07-08 school year, 60.1% were rated “outstanding,” 31.3% were rated “very good,” 8% were rated “satisfactory,” and 0% were rated “unsatisfactory.” In the Elgin School District for the school year 03-04 to school year 06-07, 88.1% were rated “excellent,” 11.4% were rated “satisfactory,” and 0.5% were rated unsatisfactory.” In the Chicago Public Schools for school year 03-04 to school year 07-08, 68.7% were rated “superior,” 24.9% were rated “excellent,” 6.1% were rated “satisfactory,” and 0.4% were rated “unsatisfactory” (Keeling, D., Mulhern, J. et al, 2009).

...teachers are treated as interchangeable parts, or widgets.

In districts that use the binary “Satisfactory / Unsatisfactory” rating system, the “unsatisfactory” rating is almost never used. For example, in the Denver Public Schools only 1.4% were rated “unsatisfactory.” In the Jonesboro Public Schools only 0.3% were rated “unsatisfactory.” In the Springdale Public Schools there were no teachers rated as “unsatisfactory” (Keeling, D., Mulhern, J. et al, 2009).

Teachers report not enough is being done to recognize and retain top performers as measured by their impact on student learning. For example, 59% of teachers report that their district is not doing enough to identify, recognize, compensate, promote, and retain the most effective teachers by their impact on student learning. One anonymous teacher surveyed in the report said it best when it was written, “I and others work hard because we have a conscience, but I don’t think the district sees us as any different than the lower performing teachers. Teachers who work hard receive very little praise or notice” (Keeling, D., Mulhern, J. et al, 2009).

Weak evaluation practices and systems mean that many teachers receive little meaningful feedback. For example, 39% of Denver teachers

who had a development area identified on their most recent evaluation do not know which performance standard they failed to meet (Keeling, D., Mulhern, J et al, 2009).

Teachers treat the conferral of tenure as a foregone conclusion based on the performance messages sent during the probationary period. Three of every four probationary teachers are confident to very confident that they will receive tenure, or its equivalent. An outstanding 66% of probationary teachers received a rating greater than “satisfactory” on their most recent performance evaluation (Keeling, D., Mulhern, J et al, 2009).

The report yielded truly alarming data analysis to the question, “Are there tenured/non-probationary teachers in your school who deliver poor performance?” Both principals and teachers agree that poor instruction is pervasive. For example, in Akron, 64% of teachers and 72% of principals answered “yes.” In Chicago, 58% of teachers and 78% of principals answered “yes.” In Little Rock, 63% of teachers and 75% of principals answered “yes.” In Springdale, 40% of teachers and 46% of principals answered “yes.” Principals, more so than teachers, think that poor instruction is pervasive (Keeling, D., Mulhern, J. et al, 2009).

Dismissal for poor instructional performance virtually never occurs. For example, the frequency of teacher dismissals for performance among non-probationary teachers was none for Akron, 9 for Chicago, 2 for Cincinnati, none for Denver, none for Elgin, none for Jonesboro, none for Pueblo, 2 for Rockford, none for Springdale, and 1 for Toledo (Keeling, D., Mulhern, J. et al, 2009).

The New Teacher Project 2009 recommends a call to action for school districts to move beyond treating teachers like widgets. Specifically, the report calls for the following recommendations:

1. Adopt a comprehensive performance evaluation system that fairly, accurately, and credibly differentiates teachers based on their effectiveness in promoting student achievement and provides targeted professional development to help teachers improve. The first recommendation includes several features the report assumes would make performance evaluation systems more effective, such as clear and straightforward performance standards, regular monitoring and norming of evaluators, frequent and regular feedback to teachers, professional development targeted to individual teacher needs, and intensive support for teachers falling below performance standards.

2. Train administrators and other evaluators in the teacher performance evaluation system and hold them accountable for using it effectively. The logic underlying this second recommendation is that even with high-quality evaluation instruments and processes, many supervisors responsible for using these instruments will continue to inflate their ratings without adequate training on how to rate reliably against a rigorous set of standards.
3. Integrate the performance evaluation system with critical human capital policies and functions, such as teacher assignment, professional development, compensation, retention, and dismissal. This third recommendation is based on the premise that evaluations when fair, reliable, and credible should be attached to some stakes for teachers so that teachers and evaluators take the evaluation process seriously. There is an underlying logic that the quality of teaching and student learning will be improved by excluding the least effective teachers, motivating satisfactory teachers to improve their effectiveness through rewards and recognition.
4. Address consistently ineffective teaching through dismissal policies that provide lower-stakes options for ineffective teachers to exit the district and a system of due process that is fair but consistent. This fourth recommendation is a response to the very low rates of teacher dismissal. The underlying logic seems to be that given systems for which dismissal is usually reserved only for teachers who endanger children and involves a lengthy, expensive legal process, very few teachers are actually dismissed even when they receive unsatisfactory ratings (Keeling, D., Mulhern, J. et al, 2009).

The Education and the Public Interest Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder and the Education Policy Research Unit of Arizona State University adds five additional recommendations, including the following:

1. Develop and support a joint state and federal initiative to create voluntary core standards for teaching that are aligned to national core student standards.
2. Provide state and federal resources to support the creation of innovation zones for the development of new models for teacher evaluation.

3. Develop technology platforms to support the on-line training of raters and the scoring, calibrating, benchmarking, and reporting of teacher performance data through independent peer and administrator review.
4. Establish a district or state board of examiners that will review and approve evaluation programs and practices.
5. Raise standards for judging the quality and rigor of teacher evaluation by funding and conducting studies of the reliability and validity of existing programs (Pecheone, R.L. & Wei, R.C., 2009).

While The New Teacher Project 2009 addresses a serious problem that needs immediate attention in the educational community, it is not without its problems or criticisms. For example, this writer questions the rationale as to why the report chose not to sample the states and districts that are known for more rigorous teacher evaluation systems such as Florida and South Carolina, “right to work” states with weak teacher unions such as Georgia, Texas, and most Southern states, states with strong incentives for National Board certification such as North Carolina and South Carolina, or states that have implemented performance-pay and career ladder programs such as Louisiana, South Carolina, and Arizona.

...only 14 states have legislation that requires school systems to evaluate teachers at least once a year

The recommendations of the report might have been affected if such states had been included in the sample. In addition, the report fails to rest its policy recommendations on research that documents the

features of effective, educative, valid, and reliable evaluation structures and strategies. The report appears to generally ignore the research based on teacher evaluation and makes no mention of existing appraisal systems that hold high standards for examining teacher effectiveness. The report’s recommendations echo past rhetoric of teacher evaluation critiques and do not go far enough to question the current constraints of the system. Meaningful change will require systems thinking and a commitment to provide much greater investment support for innovation to build, test, and audit evaluation systems that can both stand up to public scrutiny and be practically feasible. From a research perspective, the lack of information about the study’s sampling strategy and response rates to surveys limits readers’ ability to generalize the findings.

There already exists a body of knowledge on teacher evaluation that has been documented over the last several decades by other researchers (Lavelly, C., 1992; Menuet, B.P, 2005; Peterson, K.D., 2000; and Tucker, P.D., 1997). Also, it is important to note from historical records that states have shown little leadership in supporting and promoting teacher quality, as evidenced by the fact that only 14 states have legislation that requires school systems to evaluate teachers at least once a year (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2007).

Even though The New Teacher Project 2009 seems to stack the odds against finding examples of more rigorous evaluation practices, the larger picture of teacher evaluation in the United States is not totally bleak. For example, the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) is an intensive evaluation and support program patterned after Charlotte Danielson's model to improve teaching by focusing on instruction and student learning (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2007; Cohen, D., Solomon, L.C., et al, 2007).

The Connecticut BEST program is a statewide evaluation system focusing on beginning teachers with under four years of teaching experience. BEST was established in 1989 by statute to improve teacher quality by providing new teachers with mentors, training, and requiring all teachers to submit a portfolio of their teaching which is then evaluated by subject-area peers (Berry, B. & Wilson, S.M., 2001).

What The New Teacher Project 2009 says is important, but just as important is what the report does not say. For example, the report does not say that tenure makes it impossible to dismiss a teacher. Even before teachers earn tenure, districts rarely exercise the right to rate teachers "unsatisfactory" or to dismiss them. It appears that the culture of schools plays a significant role—not just tenure. The report does not say that principals are too lazy or incompetent to evaluate correctly. Administrators appear hesitant to assign negative ratings for many reasons, such as inadequate training and fear of pushback from faculty. Principals are often limited by time, support personnel, and uncertainty about district support. The report does not say that we would not have effective teachers if they were weeded out before tenure. Tenured teachers need regular feedback, evaluation, and development, just as beginning teachers do. Teachers often report that some ineffective teachers were once very effective in the classroom, but they have burned out or lost focus. The report does not say that the solution to the evaluation problem is to make it much easier to fire ineffective teachers. Addressing the widget effect means going far beyond rooting out incompetence.

While poor performance cannot be allowed to endure, the hardest work will be evaluating each teacher consistently and making all teachers more effective. Finally, the report does not say that there are no bad teachers, only bad schools and bad principals. Teachers report poor performance in their schools. They find it frustrating and demoralizing, and they want something done about the problem. By and large, teachers are very professional people with well-meaning goals for their students.

In summary, The New Teacher Project 2009 may be just another national report that finds its way through the corridors of higher education for discussion and additional research, but it is not taken seriously for action and correction at the grassroots level of education. Or it can be another national report that shakes the very foundations of the educational enterprise to improve student learning. The authors of the Widget Effect accurately describe the apparent educational malpractice in the way teacher evaluation is currently implemented and used. The report's primary flaw concerns its failure to incorporate and benefit from the existing body of knowledge on teacher evaluation as well as existing reform efforts. The report nonetheless stands as an important documentation of current practices in many states and districts. In the end, reinventing teacher evaluation is needed, but it will require more than a report to see the fruits of its recommendations. *LEJ*

References:

- Berry, B. & Wilson, S.M. (2001). *A case of successful teaching policy Connecticut's long-term efforts to improve teaching and learning*. Seattle, WA: Center of the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.
- Cohen, D., Solomon, L.C., White, J.T., & Woo, D. (2007). *The Effectiveness of the Teacher Advancement Program*. Santa Monica, CA: National Council for Excellence in Teaching.
- Keeling, D., Mulhern, J., Sexton, S., & Weisberg, D. (2009). *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Teacher Differences*. The New Teacher Project.
- Lavelly, C. (1992). *Actual incidence of incompetent teachers*. Educational Research Quarterly, (15)2, 11-14.
- Menuet, B.P. (2005). *Teachers' perceptions of professional incompetence and barriers to the dismissal process*. Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education, 18(4), 309-325.
- National Council on Teacher Quality (2007). *State teacher policy yearbook: Progress on teacher quality*. Washington, D.C.

- Pechione, R.L. & Wei, R.C. (2009). Review of *"The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Teacher Differences."* Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Policy and Education Policy Research Unit.
- Peterson, K.D. (2000). *Teacher evaluation; A comprehensive guide to new directions and practices* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Tucker, P.D. (1997). *Lake Wobegen: Where all teachers are competent (or, have we come to terms with the problem of incompetent teachers?).* Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education. 11(2), 103-126.

Dr. Tim Mizelle earned his Ph.D. from Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia, in educational administration and leadership. He is presently associate professor of educational leadership at Concordia University Chicago. Before coming to Chicago, he served in higher education teaching in North Carolina and Georgia. For on-site school climate diagnostic consultations, email tim.mizelle@cuchicago.edu.

Forgiving “Unforgivable” Injustices: A Lutheran Interpretation of the Processes of Interpersonal Forgiveness

by Henry A. Corcoran

Researcher and clinical social worker, Beverly Flanigan (1992) tells the story of Ann Roland. When she came home from work one Wednesday, there unexpectedly in the driveway, sat a rent-it-yourself moving van. Inside the van, she found many of her possessions—television, furniture, various boxes, and even a favorite painting. Fear gripped her heart.

As she walked into the house, she saw her husband, Jerry, seated in one of the chairs still in the living room. Flanigan (1992) narrates this encounter:

He looked slowly up at her and, his eyes finally meeting hers, said, “I’m leaving you. It just isn’t good anymore, and I guess you’ll find out, anyhow. I have another woman. We’ve been together for three years, and I want to marry her” (pp. 15-16).

Flanigan (1992) interprets the meaning of this event, “With four sentences, Ann’s world fell apart” (p. 16). The pieces of a contract-for-life fluttered to the floor of her life. She staggered through the months following the violation. A series of emotions assaulted her sense of stability grief and hatred, bewilderment and shame. Physical symptoms, frequent illnesses and sleep deprivation, plagued her. Her inability to concentrate damaged her work and the care of her children. She reached a pivotal place. Flanigan (1992) records,

Finally, Ann faced the fact that she had been permanently and profoundly changed; she could either forgive her injurer or allow her husband’s adultery and abandonment to “govern her life from that moment on” (p. 16).

According to Flanigan (1992), “unforgivable” injuries carry a moral dimension. They fracture one’s conception of a moral world. Profound and intimate wounds assault a person’s world-view. A violated person often carries weighty burdens from the damaging events, questions about justice and love, about divine presence and abandonment, about shame and fear, and about the persistence and recurrence of pain flowing into the present from the wounded past. The seeming injustice of violations

and the failure of divine action to thwart them oppose the ideas of a moral universe and a loving God. The perception about God's abandonment of the weak, and the profound feelings of shame and terror, combined with the unpredictable storms from memories of the wounding events steal away personal value and any comfort from the image of divine attention. The questions: "What did I do to deserve this?" "Why did these things happen?" and "Where was God?" reach into the very core of one's sense of a place in the world and unseat one's perception of personal value. As we stagger about, haunted by these questions, plagued by our pain, and perplexed about how to regain control, we also discover that we search for another and more gratifying ending to the story. Like Ann Roland, we do not want our injurer to author the conclusion.

We find ourselves surprised that in the context of the church we face a variety of injustices. I have listened to tales of injustices from veteran church-workers who cannot get a call because they are "too expensive" to tireless workers who have reached the end of their "boundless supplies of energy," from families shamed by a child "coming out" to those shocked by the uncharitable maneuverings of the "other side" of a power struggle. Rather than offering solutions to the challenges of living in a broken world, the church often exacerbates the problem of forgiveness. In the context of church, sometimes the movements toward forgiveness advance and retreat and meander rather than directly flow to freedom. Nonetheless, Christ's straightforward imperatives to forgive come to mind—imperatives strengthened by their proven effectiveness to free injured people from bondage to the painful past. Every Christian who has lived for even a few years of adult life should be able to relate to the power of forgiveness to break the ponderous chains that link us to our pain.

Yet, many times I have wrestled to forgive, to "extend my hand to the injurer," in obedience to my Lord, and not been jolted by electrical currents of grace and kindness. Sometimes, maybe most times, my acts of forgiveness correspond rather to processes described by forgiveness researchers (Allender, 1990; Enright & North, 1998; Worthington, 1998). While I celebrate the few times I have experienced God's love with some measure of intensity, most often my stories of forgiveness resemble Ann Roland's months, even years, of confusion and frustration, and recurring feelings of shame and rage. Often, I have reached the same pivotal moment, when I faced the struggle to write a new end of the story. How do we finish the tale with a more satisfying conclusion?

For my fellow servants of grace who struggle with their own wounds and who desire to help heal the hurts of those they serve, I intend to look first in a modest fashion at the literature on forgiveness. I do not lay claim to clinical expertise on the processes that researchers describe for people working to forgive, just the familiarity of one who seeks and struggles to obey Christ's forgiveness imperatives. Yet one model,¹ Flanigan's (1992) description both resonates with my experiences and focuses on the meaning of events. Attention to meaning corresponds with the task of reinterpretation, the second movement of this essay.

I want to reframe the activity of forgiveness as the re-storying of life. Essentially, it helps to view forgiveness as rooted in the activities of meditating on the Word of Christ and of prayerfully receiving God's narrative as our narrative. While emotions play a critical role in the act of forgiveness, in this essay, I focus attention simply on the cognitive activity of meaning making. By reframing forgiveness as a new perspective on the events, as a new way of organizing life events to tell a different story, we can be intentional about composing our own self understanding as those who are in Christ and guiding those we serve to see themselves in Christ. Rather than the common view of forgiveness as an act done out of gratitude for God's grace, I propose to describe forgiveness specifically as acts of faith in the forms of meditation and prayer for a life lived courageously, bearing both wounds and wonder.

Forgiving faith appropriates God's grace and applies it to another by reframing the life events into the meaning structures of the narrative of the bloody cross and empty tomb of Jesus. I describe an interpretative frame for understanding some of the meanings of the cross, meanings that call wounded persons to faith, to a new interpretation of their suffering. The *atonement framework*, especially from a forensic justification interpretative perspective, offers a new way of framing painful life events. These ideas allow us to reframe and supplement the processes found in the forgiveness literature into a clearer biblical theology for personal forgiveness. We begin with Flanigan's (1992) model of the processes of forgiveness.

The Psychological Processes of Forgiveness

Beverly Flanigan (1992) outlines six processes of forgiveness. Each process requires insights and accompanying tasks. The first, *naming the injury* calls the wounded to identify the extent of damage to the moral rules of the relationship, assess the time needed for healing, and begin to assign meaning to the events. The second process, *claiming the injury*

(or taking ownership) consciously and intentionally incorporates the injury into one's self. Third, in *blaming the injurer*, the forgiver moves from a typical victim's role of assuming too much responsibility to assign responsibility to the injurer by sifting, weighing and fact-finding of the evidence. The fourth process, *balancing the scales* seeks to restore power to the forgiver, because forgiveness "comes from a position of strength, not weakness" (p. 125). Either balance returns through punishment of the injurer or by shifting resources to the injured when the wounded person actively rejoins life. In the fifth phase, *choosing to forgive*, the forgiver releases the injurer from bonds of emotional indebtedness. The final process brings about the *emergence of a new self*.

Flanigan (1992) summarizes the meaning-making life transformations that forgiveness entails for the emerging "religious new self:"

The forgiver who transforms his beliefs into the religious paradigm decides this: Harm comes to everyone; moral contracts cannot prevent injury; no one is immune from it; but a larger force (usually God) has a reason, however mysterious, for injuries that befall people. People may suffer, but the suffering has a larger purpose. The test of a person's character is how well he functions even when he cannot understand God's plan for him (p. 167).

When we suffer unjustly, we, too, are invited to meditate on Jesus' suffering.

Flanigan (1992) describes the re-storying of one's life, a reinterpretation of life events within the framework of a new more realistic metanarrative. The metanarrative now includes the various themes of *the universality of the possibility of suffering, the impotency of moral contracts to shield one's life, that suffering serves a larger, sometimes mysterious purpose, and that character for life in this new world requires the courage to continue in spite of the apparent meaninglessness of suffering*. These themes all make our accounts, our stories more authentic. These added insights make the "world" of our stories align with the reality of a world of sin and suffering, of destruction and death. We live in a real world of suffering. Suffering, sin, and death mar our world and describe the setting for God's great story, the core narrative of Christ Jesus.

We must celebrate Flanigan's (1992) useful abstraction of the meaning themes for the forgiver. She and the other contributors to the literature on the psychology of forgiveness have done immeasurable human good. Yet, for a Christian to use the abstraction requires some

modification of its themes and requires reframing them into a more robust theological structure. Insights of the human sciences require a theological reframing in order to be more useful to servants of the Word and those we serve. The world created by God's Word frames reality very differently from the human sciences. I intend to pull several fibers apart from the fabric of God's story to show how they might serve to help us and our wounded hearers re-story our lives in God's great core narrative; how they might function to integrate the "unforgivable" injury into the wounded person's identity in Christ.

Reframing of Wounds in the Forensic Justification Model

Forensic justification declares that God manifests His righteousness in Christ Jesus, and principally in the cross and empty tomb. God sent His Son to become incarnate of a young Jewish virgin, to re-establish the kingdom of God by Word and ministry, and to die on the cross as the Substitute who bore the moral guilt of the sins of the world. By faith in this gracious gift of God, and by faith alone, the sinner receives the cleansing of all sin and the gift of the obedience of Jesus as his claim of righteousness. Based on this double transfer, of sin to Christ, and of his obedience to the two great commandments to us, God justly declares us righteous. Justification makes the claim that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth outline the central story of humanity.

As rich as the lode of forensic justification has been for the church to mine, there remain some nuggets that can be fashioned into treasures for those struggling with personal forgiveness. One of the components of the concept that lays mostly hidden in discussions of justification comes to the surface in the Apostle Peter's use of justification in the context of unjust sufferings, the core of "unforgivable" injuries. In 1st Peter 2:18-25, the apostle draws a direct line from our unjust sufferings to Christ's and then to our justification in His cross. In that movement, St. Peter gives his hearers a paint-by-the-numbers canvas in Christ of where their sufferings fit, and how their faith actions, especially meditation on Christ's suffering and prayerful reception of His identity as one's own, fill in the spaces on the canvas of His portrait.²

In 1st Peter 2:23, the shepherd apostle writes, "But he gave over [] to the one who rules justly." The brackets represent the absence of a direct object for "he gave over." This syntactical omission has prompted scholars to supply "himself" or "his cause" into the sentence.³ However, Wayne Grudem (1988) offers the best solution by allowing the absence its ambiguity, when he stuffs into the brackets, "not only himself, but

also the wrongdoers, and his followers, and indeed the entire situation” (p. 130). Based on contextual considerations,⁴ the sentence could read, “but he gave the entire situation over to the one who rules justly.” Those who actively and unjustly sought to crush his very life, his enemies, Christ entrusted to God. He gave Himself to God. He offered to the just ruler the circumstances of His suffering. The immediate context and place of application of Christ’s example is the unjust suffering of a slave at the hands of his or her owner. It would be difficult to find a greater kind of suffering than that of an exploited person at the mercy of powerful, unfair and sinful people. Yet, St. Peter calls his hearers to the same action of faith that Jesus made, to give their situation over to the one who rules justly. When we suffer unjustly, we, too, are invited to meditate on Jesus’ suffering, His prayer of trust, and God’s answer. Especially, we are called to meditate on the image of God as just ruler.

The image of God that lies beneath our awareness, the image that must be recovered is found in the apostle’s words, “the one who rules justly.” Two opposing images of judgment contend for the meaning of “one who rules.” Judgment as embodiment of the spirit of a community stands diametrically opposed to our conception of judgment in a culture that abstracts the law as principle. We pride ourselves in our skill, personal and societal, to apply the abstracted principles of justice to the various situations of life. In our judicial system, for instance, we value judges who objectively and fairly employ those principles. In fact, we judge our judges; we assess their decisions based on our “natural” sense of fairness. Rather than the image of the judge who renders judgment in accord with specific principles, the metaphor of judge as the personal embodiment of the spirit of a culture stands behind St. Peter’s words.

The apostle uses the word *krino* (judge) as an action of God like an Old Testament ruler. Volkmar Hertrich (1965) points to *meshpat* as the Hebrew word lying behind *krino*, the participle I translate, “rules.” When applied to God, *meshpat* contains the idea of one, who based on ownership as Lord, orders relationships within his social unit. For instance, because they were ruling in Israel for Yahweh, the Old Testament judges required the Spirit of Yahweh, the genuine spirit of the covenant culture (Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; etc.). Because they were ruling in Israel, the kings received the Spirit of Yahweh (1st Sam 10:6, 9; 13:14; 16:7, 13). Even the ruling or judging elders were chosen because, by virtue of a long life, they embodied the wisdom and spirit of the covenant and could therefore render wise judgment and good counsel (Job 32:4; Ezek 7:26; 1st Kings 12:6ff.; Jer 26:17; Prov 31:23; Deut 21:19; 22:15).

Their judgment considered context, circumstances, the persons involved and even their intentions, as well as covenant principles. OT judgment blended the ethics of rationality and care into a community ethos of wisdom. It is not unlike counsel given to other believers by a wise sister or brother in Christ. While the advice certainly uses biblical principles, it also applies them to specific persons in specific circumstances and adjudicates between their sometime conflicting claims with some measure of wisdom acquired in those years.

The image helps reframe forgiveness. It invites the sufferer to trust her tormentor to the Person of God the Father as one who rules justly. Jesus shifted responsibility for justice and retribution to God. The apostle's words invite the injured person to abandon the right, admittedly a powerful value in our cultural context, to assess his circumstances with the abstracted principles of fairness. Justice like truth, in St. Peter's applied theology is not an abstraction, but a Person. After meditating on Christ's prayer of trust, by prayer the wounded one gives her situation, both her enemy and desire for "justice" to God, the very embodiment of justice and the personification of mercy and grace, "God will do what is best and right for me and for my injurer." God will compose the best possible story to fit each into the new paradigm of human existence, the Christ pattern (Phil 2:5-11). In the prayer of trust, one re-stories the life events into a different plot structure. Joseph shifted from "my evil brothers did immeasurable harm to me" to "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives (Gen 50:20)." This shift, this transformation of thinking, a transformation rooted in meditation on Christ Jesus' act of trust, allows the injured one to release to God's care the situation, the injurer, the demand for justice and himself and his wounds.

Because of the resurrection, we can be confident that God will "turn inside out" the very worst into the best. He transformed the shame and humiliation of a Roman cross into the glory and boast of every believer. By placing my confidence in God, I forsake the right to apply my own ideas of justice to the circumstances. Rather, in the simultaneous act of forgiveness with the prayer of trust, we understand our lives, even our most painful moments, as unfolding in the presence of God, a God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ, and most centrally in the sufferings of Jesus on the cross and in his incredible reversal of those horrors in an empty tomb. He is not an indifferent observer of this unfolding story. What He adds transforms the story. He adds Christ.

In Christ, God to whom we entrust our enemy was beaten by

unseen tormentors, unjustly tried, mercilessly scourged, cruelly mocked, heartlessly spat upon, savagely cursed, and hopelessly abandoned on a bloody tree. God suffered in Christ's passion. He is the God who does not turn his gaze from our suffering or who clamps his ear against our cries. Rather God enters into and experiences the full weight, ugliness and brutality of suffering. He suffers with us. He does not stand above us in white coat, clutching His clipboard, doing an objective study of pain. No, He clothes Himself with our flesh that He might know our suffering from inside. Yet, Jesus also prays over those who violate his body, "Father, forgive them." He dies while entrusting his enemies to God *and* praying for their blessing. By meditating on Christ's prayer, and joining to his prayer our prayers, the Spirit links us to Christ's life power, his life of faith.

Christ Jesus joins us to the central plot of humanity. He bears the moral weight of sin. He dies the death of all sinners. He writes a new chapter in his faith, a chapter bursting with new life. We enter into the faith *and* the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus with prayer obedient to the apostle's call to entrust our life events, especially our wounds to the one who rules justly. We enter into this death when we, by faith through meditation, reframe the events of our lives into God's story. Turning to the injurer, when I forgive, I come to the end of the "justice demander" within my heart. Death, the death of my demand for justice echoes my death in the forensic justification model, a second mostly hidden aspect of this theological construct.

Justification "kills" the old me.⁵ Conceptually, forensic righteousness builds on the moral law. As Gerhard Forde (1988) perceptively notes, law casts our human existence into life under conditions. He writes:

Virtually our entire existence in this world is shaped, determined and controlled by conditional promises and calculations. We are brought up on conditional promises. We live by them. Our future is determined by them. Conditional promises always have an "if-then" form. (p. 18).

It fits the "co-operate and graduate" rubric intoned by college students. *If* you give back the professor's "right" answers, *then* you will graduate. *If* you attend the latest church-growth conference, *then* your church will flourish. *If* you follow the current educational practice guru, *then* your students (and their parents) will love you. *If* you develop a strong devotional life, *then* you will be God's person. Conditional living gives us control, control over our existence under the law, and "control over God." If we do what we are supposed to do, then we can "cash in"

on the promised blessings. We have rights. As Forde (1988) eloquently argues:

So, as old beings, we hang rather tenaciously onto these conditional promises. As a matter of fact, that is what largely characterizes our *being* in this world as *old*. We hang desperately onto the conditional promises, hoping to control our own destiny. (p. 18).

Yet forensic justification *undoes* conditional living. God's saving act comes to us as *unconditional* promise and in a "because-therefore" rubric. Again, Forde (1988) helpfully instructs us:

Because Jesus has overcome the world and all enemies by his death and resurrection, *therefore* (and only for that reason) you shall be saved. *Because* Jesus died and rose, *therefore* God here and now declares you just for Jesus' sake (not even for your sake but for Jesus'). *Because* Jesus has borne the sin of the whole world in his body unto death and yet conquered, *therefore* God declares the forgiveness of our sins. Now, of course, as old beings we have a desperately difficult time with such unconditional promise. It knocks everything out of kilter. (pp. 18-19).

**Forgiveness as action claims
a new end to the episode.**

Before we leave Forde's instruction, I would add (what I'm certain Forde would not), *because* God demonstrates his love in the gospel, *therefore* the God whose word of gospel I trust becomes a trustworthy guide (through the law) for the life I live in response to the gospel.⁶

Forensic righteousness shatters our old nature, the self that seeks control over life via conditional living. Justification nullifies any redeeming value to our activities (Gal. 3:3). I die to life under the law, so that I might live to God. In justification, nothing I *do* counts. Jesus acts. He dies. His blood cleanses my life of sin. He lives to God. His every heartbeat says, "Yes" to God. His every thought runs along neurological pathways that run straight to the Father's central passion. His every action honors the holy One. His obedience covers me. More, He gives me Himself. Christ Jesus *does*. Toxic with sin through and through, my doing means nothing. His *doing* justifies me. God declares my life "Just," because of the Son's life, death and resurrection and because of Jesus alone. Conditional living, the old being's way of controlling his life here and his destiny forever, is broken, undone, shattered by God's unconditional promise. The old me dies. The story I now tell, the story of trust in God's doing the best for me, the best for the situation, His

best for the injurer, describes an end to my way of being in the world. I no longer find my center in myself, in my doings, in my projects, in my manipulations, but in Jesus (Gal 2:19-20; Forde, 1988, p. 20). Again, Forde's comments disclose the meaning of justification:

Just the sheer and unconditional announcement "You have died"—the uncompromising insistence that there is nothing to do now, that God has made his last move—just that, and that alone, is what puts the old being to death, precisely because *there is nothing for the old being to do*. The God who says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy," has decided to do just that through the death and resurrection of Jesus. There is no way for the old being to do anything about such grace. The unconditional justification, the grace itself, *slays* the old self and destroys its "body of sin" so as to fashion a new one. It is all over! (1988, p. 21).

When forensic justification kills the "conditional living" me, it destroys also the one who seeks to control others by means of the same conditional law. The gospel that calls faith into being, a new self, crucifies all that is not of faith. Justification ends my control over my life and my control over others. Justification reframes human existence. The life of faith, the sanctified life is a life of artistry, "the art of *getting used* to the unconditional justification wrought by the grace of God for Jesus' sake" (Forde, 1988, p. 13), a life lived in freedom and lived in trust of the living God. It is a lifelong process. God uses our intimate wounds to sanctify us, to help us to live the faith of Jesus, to grow in the Spirit.

Forgiveness as action claims a new end to the episode. Christ's resurrection establishes a new end to the story. The violation, the injury moves from the end of the episode to its proper place. Forgiveness allows the resurrection to be grafted onto the events. Forgiveness means that I choose to understand that God's grace; God's life replaces my call for justice, and substitutes my longing for my injurer to suffer with prayers of blessing.

When viewed through the lens of justification, Christ's imperative to forgive simply becomes another death in a long series of deaths to the old self that defines life via law. Christ's cross kills the old being who demands his rights to control his own destiny. Forgiveness acts in accord with the new reality created by Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Faith receives that reality for me. As an act of faith, forgiveness receives and then extends the new reality to the other. Forgiveness slays the old me—and what is more important, thereby, makes a "place" for new life. By entrusting my painful experiences to God, my new self moves

into greater freedom, joy and love. The cross ends this curse of sin in my life. Sin, death, the old being—none can follow me past the cross, past the reception of grace. (However, please remember, we are talking about a process. We may need to daily return to this and other biblical narrative materials to meditate and prayerfully receive God’s version of our stories.)

“Maria,” reviewing an earlier version of this essay, shared the following:

Let me tell you a personal story as an illustration. This past Good Friday I attended [a church] where they have a traditional adoration of the cross. But, this service was done in a radical manner. The [celebrant] gave a gospel sermon and encouraged each person to bring the most hurtful things that had happened, all the losses of each personal life, to the cross and really give them to Jesus as a new beginning. He encouraged people to let God show them which things were the deepest losses, maybe the ones least understood on a rational level.

I knew what I had to take there, first the loss of my relationship with [my estranged husband] which was by far the deepest loss of my life since he was once my dearest friend and once the person I trusted most, and the loss of my job and the demeaning, hurtful things that accompanied that loss. I needed to take the emotional losses right to that cross and to Jesus and I did it, crying my way down the aisle to the cross as I asked Him to help me get there and give it all to Him...and He met me there with such power and grace that I am stunned whenever I think of it.

He took the losses and He took charge of my emotions and feelings about the pain and injustice with the very act of giving Him these deep hurts and surrendering my will. Although I had mentally understood the issue, this emotional act of surrender was transformational for me. This was His unconditional love towards me that He can and will transform my life through His power, the power of His sacrifice and resurrection. He is the author of the re-framed story of my life. His grace is the center of the “new story.”

By faith, she allowed Christ to re-write the end of her storied episode.

Conclusion

The declaration of Christ in the Word of God invites the hearer to participate in the core narrative of the death and resurrection of the Son of God through the law-gospel dialectic. The gospel kills the old nature, the old way of living in this world that refuses to let God be God. The

gospel creates a new nature, essentially faith, a radical new manner of living. The gospel of Christ confidently declares a new state of things. Jesus Christ has overcome sin and all that sin's unleashing has caused. The gospel invites all to trust Him and to enter into His victory, into His faith. Justification calls the wounded to a life of faith, faith active in giving over the life events to God. Justification reframes our suffering into a meaning structure where God sets us free to live the Christ life of spontaneous good works, care for our neighbor and the world, and service through our various vocations.

The core narrative draws its authority and power from the continuing waves of life flowing from the fact of the resurrection, its relationship to sin and death, and to faith and life with God. Hearing and reading and pondering the gospel narrative rips our stories from our "created" worlds, holds them up against God's story to demonstrate the radical differences, and with the dawning of insight from the gospel that is centered in the resurrection of Jesus, sutures them together. The Christ presented in the Word calls forth a new quality, a new perspective on the heart's demands for justice. God's story gently whispers, "Grace." In the faith created by that small voice, the Word implants love, forgiveness, mercy, and grace in one's heart for others. Faith, the new creation of the Word has power to perform, to act out the very qualities God implanted in the heart. The biblical narratives, centered in the world destroying and world creating Christ core narrative, spiritually transform lives. They grant new interpretive structures, new materials for the re-storying of lives. The gospel of Christ Jesus establishes a foundational paradigm for the plotting of our lives, even our wounds, into the life and ministry, suffering and death, resurrection and enthronement of the Lord of life. His life story makes our stories make sense. *LEJ*

Endnotes

1. All of the models that I looked at appear similar. They include the Enright and Human Development Study Group model (1991) as explained by Robert Enright, Suzanne Freedman, and Julio Rique with "The Psychology of Interpersonal Forgiveness" in *Exploring Forgiveness*, eds. R. Enright and J. North (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1998) and Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).
2. Selwyn (1946) notes two meanings for *υπογραμμων*: "a tracing of letters for children to write over or copy" and "an architectural outline or artist's sketch, to be coloured or filled in by others" (p. 179). Obviously, the second meaning suggests my metaphor.

3. While 'Himself' does correspond with Christ's final words from the cross as recorded by St. Luke, Michaels (1988) points to the immediate context in the apostle's discussion. He writes, "Jesus' enemies are the implied object here, just as they are with the verbs 'insult in return' and 'threatened' in the two previous clauses." (p. 47)
4. In accord with Grudem's position (1988), the δέ functions adversatively to contrast the clauses, not just the verbs. In the clauses, the participles outline the circumstances, being reviled and suffering, of His not reviling and not threatening. This interpretation connects the initial circumstances of the slave's unjust treatment, to the circumstances of Jesus' acts of faith. It then correlates both of those to the result of Christ's acts, God's transformation of the entire cross event (the circumstances and Jesus' faith) into that which frees us from sins to live by His righteousness.
5. See Rom 6:3-4; Gal 2:20, 5:24; Eph 4:22, 24; Col 3:3, 9, 10.
6. See Formula of Concord, Epitome and Solid Declaration, VI.

References:

- Allender, D. (1990). *The wounded heart: Hope for victims of childhood sexual abuse*. Colorado Springs: NavPress.
- Enright, R.D., & North, J. (Eds.). (1998). *Exploring forgiveness*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Flanigan, B. (1992). *Forgiving the unforgivable: Overcoming the bitter legacy of intimate wounds*. New York: Macmillan.
- Forde, G. (1988). The Lutheran view [of sanctification]. In D. Alexander (Ed.), *Christian spirituality: Five views of sanctification*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Grudem, W. (1988). *The First Epistle of Peter: Introduction and commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans.
- Herntrich, V. (1965). κρίνω: B. The OT Term שפט. In G. Kittel (Ed.) and G. Bromiley (Ed. and Trans.), *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (Vol. III): Θ-K. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Michaels, J. R. (1988). *Word Biblical commentary* (Vol. 49): 1 Peter. Waco, TX: Word Books.
- Selwyn, E. G. (1946). *The First Epistle of St. Peter: The Greek text with introduction, notes, and essays, 2nd Ed.* Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Worthington, E. (Ed.) (1998). *Dimensions of forgiveness: Psychological research and theological perspectives*. Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.

Henry Corcoran, MDiv, MEd, PhD *is an alumnus of Concordia University Chicago (then Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, IL) and completed subsequent graduate work at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, IN and Marquette University prior to earning the PhD in Higher Education at the University of Denver. His post-doctoral work as a research fellow with the North American Professors of Christian Education has involved a grant-funded study of biblical narrative via interviews of seminary students. He has served on the faculty of Milwaukee Lutheran High School, as campus pastor at the University of Denver and, most recently, as pastor of Christ Triumphant Lutheran Church, Denver, CO.*

Christians in the Hipster Subculture: What Does the Gospel have to do with Skinny Jeans, Irony, and Indie Bands?

by Courtney Wilder and Jeremy Rehwaldt-Alexander

Skinny jeans. Ironic reappropriation of culture from the eighties. Cynical detachment. Indie bands from Brooklyn. The hipster aesthetic is everywhere around us. It's gone mainstream. And it has entered the Christian tradition, most notably in the form of what we might call "Christian hipsters," a slippery category that encompasses those who participate in both the Christian tradition and the hipster "lifestyle." Perhaps you've seen them around campus, in your classes, in your church, on the street. Maybe you're wondering: what's going on here? What are the religious implications of piercings, listening to vinyl records, and riding a fixed-gear bicycle? What, if anything, are hipsters bringing to the ongoing engagement between religion and culture?

The experience of Christian hipsters, as a social group, raises a set of questions about the interaction of lifestyle and theology. To what degree does Christianity shape the consumer choices, media preferences, and social engagement of Christian hipsters? And, inversely, to what degree do the consumer choices, media preferences, and social engagement shape the theology of this group? An examination of these questions, aimed at this particular subculture, illuminates broader questions about the relationship of religion and culture, and, in the process, may be able to help you understand what some of your students are doing, culturally and theologically.

What Is Hip?

The term "hip" seems linked to the words *hepi* or *hipi*, from west Africa and referring to seeing or opening one's eyes. John Leland, in his history of hip, explains that it "begins, then, as a subversive intelligence that outsiders developed under the eyes of insiders," as Africans are brought to the Americas as slaves. This new "hip" way of seeing offers, Leland explains, "an alternate status system, independent of money or bloodline," a way of setting oneself apart from the mainstream (Leland, 2004, pp. 6, 10, 15).

The subculture of "hipsters"—a much newer term emerging in the

1950s describing those who are “hip”—is associated with a particular aesthetic, evident in clothing and media tastes, as well as with a particular ideological stance vis-à-vis mainstream cultural tastes and positions. While the idea of being hip has a long history in the United States, the hipster subculture has again entered the public consciousness full force in the last decade (see, for instance, Fletcher, 2009; Poniewozik, 2007).

Hipsters can perhaps best be defined through a series of family resemblances, based in large part of lifestyle preferences, rather than as a clearly bounded group. Robert Lanham, author of *The Hipster Handbook*, describes the hipster lifestyle as centered on three core themes—an emphasis on “stuff,” that is, a particular aesthetic linked to consumer products—clothes, music, and so on; the development of cultural “pastiche,” “the hodgepodge blending of elements from pop culture to create a sensibility;” and irony, a cynical detachment and critique of mass culture (Lanham, 2009). There are websites galore—both fawning and critical—categorizing and subcategorizing hipsters, following on the heels of books like Lanham’s and the similar *Field Guide to the Urban Hipster* (see, for instance, Hipster Handbook, 2009; Lorentzen, 2008; Aiello, 2003). Why such fascination? And what does it have to do with Christianity?

Why Christian Hipsters?

While some people seem to love to hate hipsters, the hipster identity is simultaneously being embraced by a segment of the Christian community, contrary to the *Hipster Handbook’s* characterization of Sunday School teachers as necessarily “unhip.” In one of his blog entries examining the phenomenon of Christian hipsters, Brett McCracken provides some definitional clues:

Christian hipsters tend not to like contemporary Christian music (CCM), or Christian films (except ironically), or any non-book item sold at *Family Christian Stores*... They prefer “Christ follower” to “Christian” and can’t stand the phrases “soul winning” or “non-denominational...” Christian hipsters like music, movies, and books that are well-respected by their respective artistic communities—Christian or not... Christian hipsters love thinking and acting Catholic, even if they are thoroughly Protestant. They love the Pope, liturgy, incense... Christian hipsters love breaking the taboos that used to be taboo for Christians. They love piercings, dressing a little goth, getting lots of tattoos... A lot of them love skateboarding and surfing, and many of them play in bands. (McCracken, 2009)

We can see in this description the core identity that Lanham identified: It includes a consumerist component—clothes, music, accessories. It involves a theological and cultural pastiche, drawing on historic elements of the Christian tradition and combining them in new ways. And it critiques “Christian” material culture by means of irony. Does this matter? And, if so, *how* does it matter?

To respond to these questions, we make use of both in-person interviews and online hipster-focused sources to offer insight into the ways that the hipster aesthetic interacts with Christian belief and practice. The hipster aesthetic seems to connect with the idea that Christians should be “in” but not “of” the world. Marcus (all respondents have been given pseudonyms), a married father, made a connection between the two. He observes,

It has been, I think, an ideal of ours to not have kids who go along with the crowd. Fitting in is far less important to us than being faithful, faithful to God, faithful to yourself...I see that also as part of what it means to be a real follower of Christ...to be someone who truly follows Christ means that we are often going against the flow of the world and making choices that others are not, and being OK with that...Clearly part of truly being a disciple is swimming upstream.

Clothing, media, and other aesthetic choices outside the mainstream are part of a broader endeavor to maintain faithfulness to oneself and, through that process, faithfulness to God. According to Christian hipsters, the two belong together; there is, according to them, a natural affinity.

Window-Dressing?...

The experience of the hipster Christians with whom we spoke tended to illustrate one of two relationships between their lifestyle choices and their religious practice. For a few of their friends, looking “hip” was simply “window-dressing,” a way of belonging, often one co-opted by churches seeking to market themselves to a new demographic. For instance, when we asked Erin, a single twenty-something woman working as a restaurant server and a singer/songwriter, whether hipsters are Christian in a different way than other people are Christian, she replied, “It depends on whether you are hipster just in the sense that you dress that way and [your] ideology is just the same, [or whether you] don’t just look artsy but are interested in a certain type of film and books and visual arts...or actually making music, and I think that’s a different thing than just looking a certain way.” If people simply adopted a cultural identity

without understanding or appreciating (or embodying) its practices, they would not, in her judgment, have much impact theologically.

A vivid example of this sort of relationship between hipsters and Christianity is the rapidly growing Mars Hill, a megachurch in Seattle (not to be confused with the rapidly growing Mars Hill hipster megachurch in Michigan, about which more below). Writer Lauren Sandler, in her book *Righteous: Dispatches from the Evangelical Youth Movement*, describes Seattle's Mars Hill congregation this way:

Mars Hill wrests future converts searching for identity and purpose from the dominion of available sex and drugs that still make post-grunge Seattle a countercultural destination. Mark [Driscoll, the church's founder and lead pastor] promises that his followers don't have to reprogram their iTunes catalog along with their beliefs—culture from outside the Christian fold isn't just tolerated here, it's cherished. (Sandler, 2006, p. 45)

Sandler details a tight-knit community, where members (often edgy: tattooed, pierced, anime-watching, urban hipsters) attend film nights together, share meals and childcare responsibilities, and participate in frequent small group meetings and social events with other church members.

While edgy, smart women with dyed hair, piercings, and tattoos are welcome at Mars Hill in Seattle, their roles once they join the congregation are tightly prescribed. Men are the leaders of the household; women are their “lovely helpers” (Sandler, 2004, p. 51). Here it seems hipster aesthetic choices are co-opted by churches looking to attract fresh converts. Lauren Sandler sees this as a dominant articulation of the relationship between hip and Christian in her description of Mars Hill church in Seattle:

The aesthetic criteria of the secular world are God's, as creator of all things.

The foundational notion of the church is “culturally liberal and theologically conservative,” a new balance of ideas that sums up the entire Disciple Generation and separates it from previous incarnations of Christianity. It wants its MTV alongside an unconditionally loving and authoritarian God; it seeks the structure of a theological orthodoxy that requires strict discipline and adherence but requires no renunciation of hipster savvy. (Sandler, 2004, p. 52)

The hipster aesthetic at the Seattle Mars Hill seems to serve as a marketing tool rather than as a critical tool for theological analysis.

...Or Transformative Interpretive Lens?

However, for nearly all of our respondents themselves, the hipster aesthetic doesn't function simply as window-dressing; instead, it serves as a critical tool for reflecting on Christian belief and practice. The hipster aesthetic provided for them—and for others involved in this subculture—particular criteria for judging “good” art forms both outside of and within the Christian tradition. The role of “secular” aesthetic judgments is visible in Rob Bell's book *Velvet Elvis*, which is part memoir, part theological reflection. Bell is the hipster pastor of the wildly successful Mars Hill, a megachurch just outside Grand Rapids, Michigan (not affiliated with the other Mars Hill church described above). Bell writes,

It is possible for music to be labeled Christian and be terrible music. It could lack creativity and inspiration. The lyrics could be recycled clichés. The “Christian” band could actually be giving Jesus a bad name because they aren't a great band. It is possible for a movie to be a “Christian” movie and be a terrible movie. It may actually desecrate the art form in its storytelling and craft. Just because it is a Christian book by a Christian author and was purchased in a Christian bookstore doesn't mean it is all true or good or beautiful. (Bell, 2005, p. 84)

Zoe, a married thirty-something woman with several children, made a similar point:

Well, this weird thing has happened where Christians have started their own, their Christian rock music. Like somehow rejecting... “We're going to do it ourselves and make it...” *Whatever*...I don't get it, really. I mean, some of that is nice and fine...But things that come from other places or just are neutral...there's value and even we as Christians can be edified or challenged or inspired by things around us that aren't stamped with the “Christian” stamp.

Erin also critiqued the distortions of such a “Christian” stamp: “I don't think the Christian music industry was ever meant to exist, and I think it's a shame that it does exist.” Her problem is that the industry is too focused on, for example, required use of repetitive God- or Jesus-language rather than on musical integrity or meaningfulness.

Bell's hermeneutical tool, at least as employed with respect to popular culture, is to first seek truth, goodness, and beauty. He writes, “My understanding is that to be Christian is to do whatever it is that

you do with great passion and devotion” (Bell, 2005, p. 84). In a recent interview he elaborates:

I don't believe in Christian art or music. The word *Christian* was originally a noun. A person, not an adjective. I believe in great art. If you are an artist, your job is to do great art and you don't need to tack on the word *Christian*. It's already great. God is the God of Creativity. Categories desecrate the art form. It's either great art or it isn't. (Blaney, 2007)

Bell's position was also forwarded by several of our informants; Marcus couched his analysis in the historic creeds of the church:

I find myself using the phrase “first article” things, as in the first article of the creed: “I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” Which just includes the principles of what makes good art. That's a first article item. God has made it all. Can God be praised in a good chord progression or does it have to say “Jesus?” Or a narrative story that's a redemption story but nobody comes to the altar?

The aesthetic criteria of the secular world are God's, as creator of all things. Thus Christians need not listen to music specifically labeled “Christian,” or attend only films specifically labeled “Christian” in order for their well-being to be fostered. This position, both in its formulation and in its presentation, uses hipster cultural critique as a tool for evaluating, and rejecting or accepting, Christian practices.

A Question of Hermeneutics

So what distinguishes people wearing “cool” clothing from people with a critical take on mainstream culture? What distinguishes the Seattle Mars Hill from the Michigan Mars Hill? Both invoke the idea of authenticity, of what is real, of having an intense personal connection with Jesus. The most significant difference is hermeneutical. Rob Bell offers this commentary on biblical interpretation: “The idea that everybody else approaches the Bible with baggage and agendas and lenses and I don't is the ultimate in arrogance. To think that I can just read the Bible without reading any of my own culture or background or issues into it and come out with a ‘pure’ or ‘exact’ meaning is not only untrue, but it leads to a very destructive reading of the Bible that robs it of its life and energy” (Bell, 2005, p. 54). In contrast, Mark Driscoll's interpretive strategy is, especially where gender roles are concerned, to take the Bible literally. The key question is whether the ideology associated with the hipster aesthetic is allowed to shape a revised biblical and theological hermeneutic.

Finding Hermeneutical Space

For our informants, their hipster aesthetic is clearly connected to—and both shapes and is shaped by—their interpretation and practice of the Christian tradition, and this relationship in turn is influenced by the hermeneutical context of the Christian community. In order for hipster interpretive tools—like irony and suspicion of popular, mainstream culture—to be used religiously, the operative hermeneutic of the religious context must be structured to allow it.

And, for some people, embodying a hipster aesthetic appears to be a vehicle for moving out of a constraining religious community or tradition into one that has a broader hermeneutic. As just one example of this, Erin noted that by choosing hipster-style clothing, she was “marked” as outside of the fundamentalist community in which she had grown up: “It’s hard to get into a community of people if you don’t dress like them or think that the same kind of worship music is what you should listen to. I always felt a little strange going back to my old church because of the way that I dressed. I had a reputation for having ‘gone secular.’”

Another interviewee, Jonathan, a married father, explained that for many of his friends, incorporating aspects of the hipster aesthetic was a strategy for limited rebellion against the constraints of a conservative Bible college—some of his friends got tattoos, but often with overtly religious themes. Over time, the community of like-minded young people that emerged provided enough space for some members to move from a particular fashion statement to seek broader theological frameworks.

In Marcus’s reflection, the same impulse is visible. He explains that he has had difficulty finding much in common with other members of his church, outside of faith: “I think at least in this congregation, I mean, with the exception of sharing a faith in Christ, which really is so huge, it is, but so many of the other things we value and want to do and talk about socially, we seem to not find very much in the church, so people who are interested in art, in music, in world affairs, in environmental issues.” Here the issue is not so much a desire for a different theological hermeneutic as for a broader social space in which to interact, and he has been able to encounter that space by congregating with other people who share his aesthetic. Through these examples, we can see the ways in which the hipster aesthetic is used as a tool or set of tools to mark, and maybe even to create, a transition to a religious space in which the aesthetic can foster innovative interactions between

theology and culture.

Although the appearance and interests of your average hipster—tattoos, thrift-store clothes, interest in independent artistic subcultures—might not be obviously Christian, there is clearly a thriving hipster Christian culture. We may see hipsters as “outsiders,” yet Christian hipsters are working within the tradition, critically reflecting in new ways on the nature of their faith and religious experience. While some hipsters might simply be adopting the lifestyle choices of their coolest friends, others are engaging in genuine and fruitful reflection about what it means to be Christian and about how to live authentically in an increasingly homogenous and consumer-driven world. Toward that end, they are employing powerful cultural tools in their pursuit of the Christian life. *LEJ*

Endnotes

1. We conducted interviews with people that we believed could fall within the loose descriptive definition of “hipster Christian.” Our interview subjects would not necessarily identify themselves as “hipsters,” though they clearly did identify themselves as Christian. Often the term “hipster” is seen as pejorative; the category is, in a way, self-excluding, as those who might fall into the category are likely to deny their participation.

References

- Aiello, J. (2003). *A field guide to the urban hipster*. New York: Broadway.
- Bell, R. (2005). *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Blaney, F. (2007, 14 November). Rob Bell on sex, God, and sex gods. *Wittenburg Door*. <http://www.wittenburgdoor.com/interview/rob-bell>.
- Fletcher, D. (2009, July 29) Hipsters. *Time*.
- Heath, J. (2001). The structure of hip consumerism. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 27(6), 1–17.
- The Hipster Handbook. (2009). Home page. <http://www.hipsterhandbook.com>.
- Lanham, R. (2009, June 29). Look at this...hipster basher. *The Morning News*. http://www.themorningnews.org/archives/op-ed/look_at_this...hipster_basher.php
- Leland, J. (2004). *Hip: The history*. New York: Ecco.
- Lorentzen, C. (2008?). Why the hipster must die: A modest proposal to save New York cool. *Time Out New York*. <http://newyork.timeout.com/articles/features/4840/why-the-hipster-must-die>.

- McCracken, B. (2009, 27 February). Are you a Christian hipster? *The Search*.
<http://stillsearching.wordpress.com/2009/02/27/are-you-a-christian-hipster/>.
- Miller, V. (2004). *Consuming religion: Christian faith and practice in a consumer culture*. New York: Continuum.
- Niebuhr, H. R. (1956). *Christ and culture*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Poniewozik, J. (2007, 8 February). Culture complex: Too cool for preschool. *Time*.
- Sandler, L. (2006). *Righteous: Dispatches from the evangelical youth movement*. New York: Viking.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to those who commented on an earlier version of this article presented at the annual conference of the Association of Lutheran College Faculty, Ann Arbor, Michigan, October 2009.

Courtney Wilder and **Jeremy Rehwadt-Alexander** are members of the faculty and teach in the religion/philosophy department at Midland Lutheran College in Fremont, Nebraska.

The Call and the Will of God

by Russell Moulds

This article addresses some common themes about God's will and prompts inquiry for further discussion. It applies to these themes some insights about the Gospel from *Luther's book, The Bondage of the Will*, his *Commentary on Galatians*, his *Treatise on Christian Liberty*, and from the doctrine of vocation.¹

Case 1: Dan's first serious struggle with the question of God's will came during his first Call yet had nothing to do with his Lutheran school placement. Rather, his confusion came from being jilted in the name of God. He met Nancy, a congregational member, early in his Call. They dated and enjoyed each other's company. As the months passed, the compatibility seemed right and the relationship grew. Beginning to think of marriage, Dan cautiously and sincerely mentioned the idea to Nancy. To his relief, she didn't balk at the possibility. Dan deliberately brought up the topic from time to time and Nancy seemed steadily receptive, until one spring night when Nancy called and said they had to talk. As the conversation unfolded, Nancy emotionally yet firmly informed Dan that they could not marry": praying about the matter, Nancy had concluded that it was God's will that she not marry Dan. Stunned yet respectful, Dan did not believe it was his place to challenge God's will. He agreed to break off the relationship. Three years later, he was still unmarried and still confused about what had happened.

Case 2: The third article of the Apostle's Creed raises questions about death and funerals. During an eighth grade religion lesson, students shared experiences of deaths in their families, relating how Jesus' death and resurrection sustained their trust in God's care and promises. Rachel raised her hand and, without waiting to be called on, quietly reported that when her grandpa died last year, someone at the funeral home approached her and her mom and told them in a sympathetic voice, "It was God's will that your grandpa died." Rachel then asked, "Did God really want my Grandpa to die?"

Case 3: Paul did not get the job even though he was qualified and had an excellent internship. The company flew him out to their

headquarters for a battery of tests and interviews which he passed “with flying colors.” All of his documentation was submitted ahead of schedule. He got great reviews from the company personnel office. Though several entry-level positions were available, he got no offer. When the turndown phone call came, Paul was devastated since his hiring had looked like a sure thing. The only thought Paul could summon to console himself was that it just wasn’t God’s will and that God had another position for him somewhere else.

Case 4: Kelly had a Call and she didn’t know what to do. She was ready to graduate certified for both high school and middle school ministry. The placement office had sent her credentials to a school with an opening in its departmentalized seventh and eighth grades. The congregation’s Call included the exact parish duties Kelly desired. With the pastor’s and principal’s support and encouragement, all the circumstances seemed right. The congregation was waiting, the days were passing, but Kelly couldn’t give an answer. Was this the place God wanted her to be? Maybe she should wait for a Call to high school. Why didn’t God give her a sign or some indication of what she should do?

What Do You Say?

Marriage, death, occupation, and professional church work, are all among the important events and decisions that compel the Christian to ponder God’s will. What sorts of things do you say about God’s will? Would you say to Dan, Rachel, Paul, and Kelly? What do you say as you face your own important life events and decisions? Whether you’re a candidate for placement or a veteran church worker, understanding the “God’s will” discussion is an essential part of doing our ministry.

Since the people we serve face these issues every day, part of our Call as a teaching minister of the Gospel is to speak Biblically and helpfully to others about God’s will for them. Also, part of our competence in ministry includes applying biblical principles about God’s will to in our own lives. Few concepts are more vexing and perplexing to Christians and for church workers: the subject pertains especially to the Call. Consider a few of the many questions the subject provokes:

- Does God have a particular planned outcome for my decisions? Does he have a preference?
- Since God is all-powerful, is it possible for me to violate God’s will?
- To what extent does God intervene in human affairs and change the course of events? In what ways does he and does he not intervene?

- Does God have a plan for my life? If so, what sort of plan is it? Is it a life “map” or “program?”
- Has God pre-selected someone for me to marry? Chosen an occupation for me? Called me to work in the church? How would I know? On what basis would I know this?
- How should I deliberate my first or next Call in a God-pleasing way?

Fraught with many questions, the concept of God’s will is also plagued by many conflicting answers. Christian bookstores display books from various authors, each offering diverse views and solutions to the mysteries and secrets (real and claimed) concerning the will of God. Exchange on the topic of God’s will in adult Bible class or a college bull session offers as many answers as participants. These questions also contain important theological and philosophical ideas such as freedom and determinacy, the nature of revelation, and our source and norm for what we teach and what we say. We cannot unpack such large themes here (see the resources suggested at the end of the article). However, we can examine some of the confusion over the “God’s will” discussion. Also, we can apply a few basic Lutheran insights about the Gospel to this discussion and to our understanding of the Call.

An instructive place to start is Deut. 29:29, “The secret thing belongs to the Lord, our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may observe all the words of this torah.” There are, then, secret councils that belong to the divine Majesty of God to which we have no access. This insight will keep us modest and humble in our discussion God’s will. We won’t presume to penetrate God’s secret councils and omnipotent will, which are beyond our comprehension. Yet God has revealed some of himself to us in Christ and the Scriptures and we can locate our discussion of God’s will in this revelation.²

Back to Law and Gospel

The Lutheran heritage actually says little about God’s will in the typical sense of God directing or orchestrating our choices and decisions. Though this lack may not sound helpful at first, such silence is a significant clue to examining our thinking about God’s will and our deliberation of a Call. The Book of Concord addresses the subject of will in terms of sinful will and God’s desire or will for our salvation. (See the index listings and cross-references under “Will, of God.”) The systematic studies of Biblical doctrine do not include treatments about God planning events and decisions in our lives. Instead, they simply

acknowledge God's constant presence and his general providence for our daily needs without trying to detect any special will. Consonant with the real complexity of life, sin and faith, Luther's discussions of God's will are correspondingly practical and complete. Luther located our Christian freedom in his teaching about God's calling or vocation.³ This rich and important concept notwithstanding, Luther's statement about

I Cor 9:19ff begins to set his teachings apart from the usual things we say and hear about God's will. He notes that the Apostle Paul,

Ate, drank, and lived with the Jews according to the law, even though it was not necessary for him. With the Gentiles, he ate, drank and lived without the law, as they did. For only two things are necessary: faith and love. Everything else you are free to do or leave undone. Therefore, you may do everything for the sake of one [situation or person], and for the sake of another refrain from everything, and in that way, treat all impartially.⁴

Gustaf Windgren's book (1957), *Luther on Vocation*, explains: "Sovereignty of love before the law involves a creative factor whose expression it is impossible to foresee, since it can steadily open up fresh and unsuspected perspectives for life's activity. In this connection, we must recall Luther's frequent statements about the freedom of the Christian 'to do and to omit'. Through this freedom, faith and relation to God attain real significance for vocation, and vocation is shaped solely according to the needs of others."⁵

Or, as St. Augustine, from whom Luther took his cue, insightfully asserts, "Love God, and do as you please."

What do these assertions mean for us? "Do as you please" does not mean we have a license to sin or indulge the preferences of our own weak flesh—Augustine begins with the First Great Commandment (and also the Second by implication). Historically, Lutherans have not troubled themselves much about discerning God's will; also, whatever others may be saying about discerning this or that decision, the Bible takes God's providence for us as a given. In most Bible stories, efforts to penetrate God's secret designs are discouraged (e.g., I Sam 28; Jn 21: 20-23). Apart from the Ten Commandments' moral implications about our decisions, the Bible does not address God's preference of this decision over that decision. Even so, this observation today seems counter-intuitive and needs further discussion.

An important slant the Lutheran tradition gives to the subject of God's will is the Biblical interpretive principle of Law and Gospel. This principle teaches that all God reveals to us should be understood in

terms of Law—what we are to do, not to do, and how we are to be—and Gospel, what God has done and continues to do for us and for our salvation. Now consider that life’s events and decisions are areas of our activity: what we do and don’t do. To search for God’s will or preference for us about behavior in our domain of activity means to look for a Word of Law, that is, a commandment to rule what we are to do. This search drives us back to Scripture and the moral code of the Ten Commandments. Apart from these Commandments expressing God’s moral will for our lives and conduct, we draw a blank in finding prescriptions for particular personal decisions (We will consider the Gospel and God’s will in a later section.)

“God Has a Plan For Your Life”

Where, then, does so much talk about God’s will and our decision making come from? Return to your Christian bookstore, examine the available books and, for the most part, you will find authors writing from a theological perspective that traces back to John Calvin. Calvin, the brilliant Swiss reformer of the church and contemporary of Martin Luther, wrote one the most important books of the Reformation, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Despite much agreement, one significant point of difference for Luther and Calvin was the doctrine of predestination. Like many other thoughtful Christians, Calvin struggled with the puzzle of why some are saved but others are not. With

Luther and his spiritual kin have consistently denied double predestination

trepidation, he concluded that people were predestined by God to their eternal state, either heaven or hell (a view that Lutherans label “double predestination”). Since Scripture says nothing about God predestining anyone to hell, Luther and his spiritual kin have consistently denied double predestination, insisting with St. Paul that “God would have all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the Truth” (I Tim 2:4).

Later Calvinist theologians, (notably the Puritans in America) extrapolated double predestination to include a divine “plan” or “will” of all events in people’s lives, elaborating this perspective especially from God’s attributes of sovereignty and omnipotence.⁶ Lutherans, by contrast, did not move to such extra-biblical inferences. Luther acknowledges God’s sovereignty and his hand in all that happens but insists that we cannot comprehend this mystery. We can only sometimes detect God’s

hand after the fact and then only roughly at best. Thus, Lutherans have sustained a more modest position of silence about matters on which God's own Word is silent and have instead focused on the salvation that God has clearly willed for us from the cross. (Cf. I Cor 2:2 and see Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art. XI, Election.)

Present popular thinking about God's will comes chiefly from one expression in particular, popularized by one of the most widely used tracts of all time, "The Four Spiritual Laws" distributed by Campus Crusade for Christ. The tract begins, "God has a plan for your life." This expression has shaped the views of countless Christians on the subject of God's will. Consider for a moment what this expression suggests. What comes to mind for most people is a "cosmic computer" image of God's will. God has keyed into history a plan or program for all the events of our lives, and our lives are the printers that are turning out the results. What this expression provokes for many Christians is an anxious search for a copy of the program or at least a print preview of what is supposed to come next.

The "God has a plan for your life" view also employs a small collection of oft-cited Bible verses such as Jer 29: 11 and Prov 16: 9. Jeremiah does prophesy God's assurance in saying, "I know the plans I have for you,' says the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.'" The context of the chapter, however, clarifies that God's words are addressed to Judah in Babylon (29:1) and that the plan is to return Judah to their homeland after a period in exile (29:14). This plan is good news for Judah and for us because God's will is to bring forth the Messiah from the family of David in the tribe of Judah. The text is God's Word for us, but it is his Word for us because it is about his salvation for us in Christ, not because it refers to some life script or program. This realization about Jer 29: 11 is at first a bit alarming for some who have never checked its context and meaning. However, the text truly comforts us as we further realize we need no longer puzzle over undisclosed divine plans and instead can entrust our welfare and all life's events, good and evil, to God's revealed plan of salvation. (See Rom 8:28 and 29-30.)

Similarly, Prov 16:9, "A man's mind plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps," is often used to infer some life script or plan as through the verse could be paraphrased, "We may lay our own plans in life, yet the sovereign God will have his way by intervening and re-directing our choices and life events according to his own perfect will." But such a mechanical view of a Hebrew proverb would be quite foreign to a

devout Israelite, who already knew how God directed his steps: with the Torah, the written book of Moses. The parallelism in the proverb is an antithetical contrast of the heart of sinful man and God's good direction (cf. Ps 1 and Ps 119). This assessment gives us a different sense of the proverb: "We sinful people may plot out our ways and intents on our own, but God gives better directions for enacting those ways in the words he has given to us through Moses [and, we would add, Jesus]."

The Popular Expressions

Though we should not be hypercritical about words (I Tim 6:4), the language we use and don't use about God's will is important because language reflects our belief about God. Some of our expressions are harmless pieties (saying "God bless you" following a sneeze) and some echo Biblical content ("See you next year, God willing" recalls James 4:15, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that"). But our language is often not Biblical and can be misleading. Consider these common examples:

- Make sure you're at peace about this decision. (Was Jesus at peace in Gethsemane?)
- Maybe the Lord is trying to tell you something. (How would you know? On what authority would you say so?)
- I hope God shows me an answer to my problem soon. (Does he have a specific answer in mind? How would you know?)
- Are you seeking God's will in this matter? (Does he have a particular preference about your decision?)
- Whenever God's closes a door, he opens a window. (This is from the Mother Superior in "The Sound of Music.")
- I feel God is leading me in this direction. (Are our feelings a reliable guide to knowledge about God?)
- Don't worry—God has a plan for your life in this situation. (Is this what Scripture means by "plan?")

All these expressions reflecting common beliefs about God and his will deserve our attention. Not that all popular views are bad, for some of the examples can, with effort, be aligned with Biblical content. But these expressions have a catch: that being right with God is up to us. They imply that God is a map maker, and it is up to us to be wise and holy enough to find and follow the map; or that he is a cryptographer, and it is up to us to be clever enough to decipher his codes. They imply that, beyond the Ten Commandments, we should search for pre-selected decisions or preferences that God has about every detail of our lives (a

notion questionable inferred from Mt 10: 29-30 where Jesus' concern is not about hairs or feathers but salvation). These expressions neglect that "the secret things belong to God."

Though we tend to use such expressions, the Bible does not. For instance, Paul's carefully crafted language in Acts and his letters never say anything like, "I had an impression that God was telling me to go to Rome, and I felt that he was leading me to seek his will for me there, so maybe God is telling you in Rome to be ready for me." Despite the absence of such language in the Bible, these expressions are present in the everyday life of the church, including our Call process. An application form used in placing church workers on a district Call list begins the essay portion

...our internal feelings are transient and often unreliable. Instead, God has given us his external and reliable Word.

with this instruction: "Specify the type of position and area of ministry in which you feel God is leading you and in which you have a strong desire to serve."

How does one feel the leading of God? The expression could be taken in different ways,

but does suggest that we search ourselves for some still, small but audible voice. The first problem with this idea is that Scripture nowhere instructs us to equate our feelings and emotions with God's will. Though we should remain cognizant of our emotional responses as important content in decision-making, we have no authority for trusting such impressions as divine. Rather, our internal feelings are transient and often unreliable. Instead, God has given us his external and reliable Word. The second problem with such language is that the expression "still, small voice" comes from the story of Elijah in I Kings 19 where God speaks to Elijah softly but clearly, telling the prophet in an audible voice to get back to Israel. Inner impressions and feelings are not God's will, and we are not to use them to second-guess what we don't know God isn't telling us.

A prayer offered in corporate worship on behalf of a candidate considering a Call was worded this way: "Lord, please lead [candidate's name] to make the decision that is pleasing to you."

The article, "the," casts this petition into theological question and the candidate (and us worshipers) into consternation. By saying "the decision" rather than "a decision," the prayer leader signals that the candidate can satisfy God's expectations only by making one specific choice. This signal implies that any choice made other than "the" decision will move the candidate out of what some have called "God's

perfect will.” If she makes the wrong decision, the candidate moves into a fearsome predicament with God by deciding contrary to God’s plan (usually called “sin”). She is now acting and living out of harmony and fellowship with God (more sin). By this reasoning, she not only risks God’s wrath but also misses the blessing God had in store for her had she made the right decision. What’s more, this was a Call to an important position of leadership, and she has probably convoluted God’s will for the Calling body. But such prayer language and its implications are distant from what Scripture actually says. God gives us his Word in Christ and the Scriptures and apart from some direct, specific revelation; God does not prescribe our life choices. (Paul’s decision in II Cor 2:12-13 is a good case study.)⁷

A memo circulated to announce a church worker’s consideration of a new vocation and location read: “[Church worker’s name] asks our prayers and counsel as he seeks to discern God’s will for his life and ministry and that of his family.”

The language concern with this statement is semantic. If seeking to discern God’s will for one’s life means turning to God’s Word for study of “leading a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called” (Eph 4:1), then well and good. But if it means (as it often does) resorting to inner impressions and other tactics for divining a secret will of God, this language misleads the Christian into unnecessary agonizing and uncertainty.

Many Christians at one time or another do agonize over making a life decision they fear may be outside God’s will. They may know God’s grace well enough to realize God will not abandon them in that decision or because of it. Yet they are still provoked to search for any hidden divine choice or preference for that specific decision such as deliberating a Call. At this point, they may employ two other tactics for detecting this phantom will of God.

Some would have us place a fleece before the Lord, a scheme from Gideon in the Book of Judges. God in a verbal revelation specifically promised Gideon an assured victory over Israel’s enemy, Midian (6: 11-24). But Gideon began testing God’s promise by asking for signs (6: 34-40). Gideon asked God to keep dry a sheepskin exposed all night to the morning dew. God complied. Then Gideon had the temerity to ask God to again confirm his promise by reversing the sign the next night, wetting the fleece with the dew but keeping the ground dry. Some Christians have wrongly interpreted Gideon’s lack of faith as an endorsement to search for God’s will by seeking signs. Though God, in

his infinite patience and to preserve Israel, tolerated Gideon's weakness and granted the signs, the context of Judges establishes that such sign seeking betrays a lack of trust in God. (Cf. Jdgs 8: 22ff; Mt 12: 38ff.)

Others would direct us to life's changing circumstances and events as indicators of God's will. This variation of sign seeking is the "Maybe God is trying to tell you something" approach.

A mild parody will illustrate:

Lord, I'm looking for a Godly spouse, and I think Susan may be the one. But your will, Lord, your will. So if that's your will, God, have me run into her tonight at the library. Or maybe tomorrow night. Actually any time in the next month will do, Lord, but the sooner the better. Excuse me now, Lord, but I've got to get to the library. Amen.

The assumption is that since God is aware of all life's circumstances, he must be arranging them to send us all messages about his will. The assumption is mistaken in that it attempts to read the secret things of God with a connect-the-dots method. Life's circumstances are entangled with sin from the devil, the world and the sinful self, and the Scriptures say nothing about reading circumstances for God's will in some oracle-like fashion. The assumption also confuses the doctrine of predestination. Predestination refers to salvation for those elected to faith, not to life events and decision-making. (See Rom 8: 28ff and Eph 1: 3ff.).

For Freedom Christ Has Set Us Free

Scripture does make important and clear Christocentric statements about God's will. The center and focus of all Scripture is Jesus. Jesus says, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness to me" (Jn 5:39). At the end of Luke's Gospel, Jesus explains that to rightly understand Scripture, we must realize that "everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled" (Lk 24: 27, 44). Luke continues:

Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Lk 24: 46-47).

The will of God, as Paul says, is that all people would be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth about Jesus (I Tim 2:4). That's the plan. That's what the Bible means when it talks about God's plan:

For he [the Father] has made know to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will according to his purpose which he set forth in

Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Eph 1: 9-10 RSV).

The word used here for plan is the Greek noun *oikonomia* from which we get the word, economy—ordering, managing, or administering a house or property. The word does not connote a plan in the sense of a script or agenda for every event, but rather a master plan for managing a larger purpose or goal. In this case, the “house and property” under management are “all things in heaven and earth,” and the goal is to unite them all in Christ whose purpose is “that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations.” God’s will is that the Law work repentance among us sinful people and that the Gospel brings us forgiveness and a saving faith in Christ. That work being done, one is then empowered by the Spirit to “lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called (Eph 4: 1).” Such is the life of freedom living under God’s grace (Gal 5: 1).

The alternative understanding of God’s will as trying to decode some unrevealed divine script would mean a life under the Law. This kind of life would mean always trying to live up to expectations that God never spells out. It would mean living in the shadow of “ought,” anxiously wondering what God would have us decide in any important situation. It would mean endless attempts to distinguish between those important situations where we believe God has some individual plan for our actions and those trivial matters that we manage ourselves (Marriage? A summer job? Lunch?). It would mean constant uncertainty about our relationship with God and, thus, uncertainty about our salvation.

By contrast, God’s actual will for us is that we live under grace. The Law shows us our sin, drives us to God’s promises, and serves as our guide for behavior, but it does not make us “at one” (effect atonement) with God. Christ alone intercedes for us. Thus, through him and with him, we are now all daughters and sons of God. This relationship is the reason Luther in his *Treatise on Christian Liberty* insists both that, “A Christian is perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; and a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”

The Christian is absolutely free, forgiven by God’s grace and liberated in decisions and actions from any condemnation of the Law. Yet this freedom is no license for sin and serving the self (Gal 5: 13) since the Christian is also totally a servant, submitting all decisions and actions the work of God’s kingdom to serve the needs of others’ temporal and eternal well-being. The apparent contradiction of free and slave is not an unsolvable paradox (like sinner/saint). It is harmonized

under the purpose of God's kingdom: that all might be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. The Christian considering a Call is free in this decision. We are free to accept the Call and we are free to return the Call to the Call body. In either event God's providence continues to work in his quiet and hidden ways through our decisions and activities (Phil 2: 12-13). God's grace prevails, and his kingdom still comes for us. Our language, discussions, prayers and letters of acceptance and decline are sometimes obscure in this freedom. We can better express ourselves about Calls and God's will when we speak in terms of Christian hope, liberty, and responsibility. **LEJ**

Endnotes

1. Two brief, helpful books that address themes related to the call and God's will are *The Christian's Calling* by Donald Heiges (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958) and *The Spirituality of the Cross* by Gene Edward Veith, Jr (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1999).
2. Luther discusses the hidden and secret will of God in *The Bondage of the Will*, (1957, tr. J.I.Packer and O.R. Johnson, Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell). For an introduction to this theme, see Paul Althaus, *The freedom of the Gracious God*, the Theology of Martin Luther, (1966, tr. Robt. Schultz, Philadelphia: Fortress Press).
3. See Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian* in John Dillenberger, (1962) Ed., Martin Luther: Selections from his writings. (New York: Anchor Books). In *Luther on Vocation*, Gustaf Wingren (1957, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press) provides a thorough treatment of Luther's ideas about God's will and Christian freedom. See especially, "The Concept of Freedom," "Cooperation" and "Stundelein."
4. Althaus, 95. Note: Because his writings are many and varied, Luther scholars caution us to be careful about citing Luther's quotations selectively. However, certain themes such as vocation, God's will, and man's will are well established in the Lutheran tradition.
5. Althaus, 147.
6. Many theologians and Bible teachers in the Reformed tradition are moving away from this mechanistic view of God's will. See, for example Gary Freisen (1980), *Decision Making and the Will of God* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press).
7. A related theme to explore is the leading of the Holy Spirit. That theme is important but beyond the scope of this article. A place to begin is "The Holy Spirit and the Conversion of the Sinner" and "The Sanctified Life, or New Obedience" in Robert Kolb (1993)

The Christian Faith: a Lutheran Exposition (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House).

Russ Moulds taught religion at Baltimore Lutheran High School for 12 years and currently teaches *The Christian Teacher's Ministry and Adolescent Psychology* at Concordia University Nebraska in Seward. This essay has also been included in *A Teacher of the Church* (Wipf and Stock, 2007) with eleven other chapters on the teaching ministry by multiple authors. He may be contacted at rmoulds@cune.edu.

Go ... And Teach! Our Wonderful Students – Part 2

by Jane Buerger

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. Ps. 139:14 NRSV

Our students certainly do make our classrooms interesting. They bring a lot of things with them, and I'm not just thinking of books, school supplies, cold and flu germs, and items for Show and Tell. Each child comes with a set of God-given qualities, written into his or her genetic code, which will impact how that child interacts with the classroom environment. One such quality, which was considered in a previous column, was the manner in which the student takes in information, whether the child is primarily a visual, an auditory, or a tactile learner.

Another quality, which is easier to recognize, is the child's sex—simply put, whether the child is a boy or a girl. Obviously boys and girls are different. There are physical differences, of course, and there are differences in how individuals in the two groups tend to respond to their peers, to their environment, and to those in authority. As teachers, we may make generalizations about which group is better behaved, which does better in certain subjects, and which is a better fit in our classroom. Several reasons are cited for these perceived differences.

There is documented evidence that girls and boys are treated differently in the classroom. Cathcart (2006) claims that teachers tend to call on boys more often than girls and give more praise and criticism to the boys. This author also claims that teachers have different expectations for the boys and girls in their classes. Boys are expected to excel in mathematics and science; girls are seen as better readers and writers. According to Cathcart, teacher attitude and behavior may lead to differences in performance. The assumption is that student achievement will parallel teacher expectation, no matter if the expectation is high or low.

Fox and Soller (2001) cite several studies (Sadker and Sadker, 1994; Leder, 1990, Feldhusen and Willard-Holt, 1993) which found that boys interact more often

with their teachers in every subject and at every grade level. The authors claim that this is a subtle form of sexism and that teacher preparation programs need to do more to make their candidates sensitive to the effects of unintended gender bias. The authors also noted that sometimes boys are more aware of the bias against girls than the girls themselves and further hypothesize that “girls notice that they get less attention from teachers but accept the situation as normal” (p. 15).

Some experts claim that the differences in school performance by boys and girls are caused, at least in part, by the toys given to very young children. In an interview prepared as part of a program designed to help students deal with mathematics anxiety (Sembera & Hovis, 1990), Dr. Sue Brown, a professor of education at the University of Houston—Clear Lake, discusses the fact that, while little girls are encouraged to play with dolls, little boys are given blocks, cars, and other toys that help them develop spatial skills. It is believed that these early play activities give boys an advantage in the areas of mathematics and science. Girls tend to talk to their dolls and with other girls while playing house and thus develop their verbal skills. Since the video is about mathematics anxiety, the implication is that girls are being treated unfairly.

A “one style fits all” classroom just will not address the needs of many children.

By citing gender bias in classroom climate and choice of playthings, we tend to place blame on well-intentioned teachers, parents, and other care-givers who genuinely love and care for the children. By now, teachers reading this article are possibly thinking, “Of course, the boys get more attention. They are the noisy ones who need to be kept on task! And, yes, they like to build towers with the blocks—and then knock them all down!”

It is possible that these behaviors and preferences are hard-wired into us before we take our first breath. As much as we may not want to admit it, certain skills and tendencies do follow gender lines. Brain research is answering and posing many questions about how boys and girls, as well as men and women, interact with their environment and with other people. PET, MRI, and SPECT scans record brain activity and blood flow through the brain. By using these instruments, scientists have identified structural and chemical differences in male and female brains and also differences in how the brains function during specific tasks.

Needless to say, this is a complex area of research far beyond the scope of this article. For individuals who are interested in further study, several books written by Michael Gurian might be of interest. Four of Gurian's books are listed with the references at the end of this article. Gurian (2001) cautions against using the conclusions of brain research to promote gender bias. In the past, since male brains are usually larger than female brains, some people have assumed that this means that girls and women are somehow inferior. Gurian makes the point that both genders have advantages and disadvantages.

It is true that boys tend to excel at tasks involving spatial reasoning while girls learn to read earlier in life and are usually more adept at conversation and verbal expression. As Gurian (1996) explains, the reasons for these differences lie in the sequence in which sections of the fetal brain develop and in the functioning and size of the *corpus callosum*, a bundle of nerves that connects the right and left hemispheres of the brain. In the female brain the *corpus callosum* is larger and more highly developed, allowing for the two hemispheres to communicate earlier and more easily. This communication is necessary for reading. Boys obviously can learn to read, but for them, reading is more difficult. The boys are often as much as a year behind the girls in terms of reading skills.

Giving boys a chance to play with dolls won't necessarily increase their communication skills. Gurian reports that young boys are likely to try to take dolls apart, throw them in the air, or knock them together. Girls are more likely to play with blocks or other building toys if the materials provided include small human figures. These figures allow the girls to include conversations and relationships in their building activities.

Boys do have advantages in other areas. Since communication between the two hemispheres is limited for boys, their brains compensate with enhanced activity within the right hemisphere, the side controlling spatial reasoning. Scientists believe that this is the reason that boys prefer toys, such as blocks, that involve the use of space and later have greater success in fields such as physics and architecture. Girls can be successful in these areas, but often they find them more challenging.

Gender differences are God-given. Psalm 139:14 appears in the heading for this article. The preceding thirteenth verse in the passage speaks of the development of the fetus prior to birth. "You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." The physical structures which are present in our human bodies, along with

the accompanying behaviors and preferences, are part of God's creation. Not to honor the differences among children is to deny the work of our Creator (Gurian, 2006).

Title IX, passed in 1972, prohibits gender discrimination in education. As teachers we need to do more. Sensitivity to gender issues must be seen apart from the social and political arenas. For a number of reasons, a "one style fits all" classroom just will not address the needs of many children. Recently a lot of attention has been given to making mathematics and science more accessible to girls. It is just as important to improve the reading and communication skills of boys. In Lutheran schools we can see each child as a unique creation, and we can help each child make good use of God-given strengths and work hard to grow in areas of weakness.

Once again, a discussion of specific strategies is a topic for books, not short articles. One of Gurian's books, *Boys and Girls Learn Differently* (2001), describes features of a two-year pilot study which used scientific knowledge of gender differences to provide a nurturing environment for both boys and girls. Suggestions include allowing girls to work in single-gender collaborative groups, a strategy which capitalizes on their communication skills and which allows girls to assume leadership roles. Hands-on activities in mathematics and science allow the boys to use their spatial skills and give the girls a chance to develop spatial reasoning as well. Games can help boys develop their communication skills while capitalizing on their competitive nature.

Gurian (2008) does add a word of caution against gender stereotypes that are too rigid. There are individuals, both male and female, that are physically, emotionally, and spiritually members of one gender, yet show brain development characteristics of the other. For instance, some girls show little interest in dolls and prefer to work alone instead of in a collaborative group. Some boys don't care much for team sports and tend to be more emotional. Gurian has coined the term *bridge brain* to describe these individuals. Their situation has little if any connection to their sexual orientation, but it can make their lives more challenging in terms of fitting in with other children. (Think about the problems of being a "tomboy" or a "mama's boy.")

As we teachers know, each student in our class is a unique individual, coming to our classroom with both gifts and challenges. At the beginning of the school term, each child, each boy or girl, is a stranger to us, but we would do well to help that child feel welcome in our classroom, "for thereby, some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb.13:2). **LEJ**

References

- Cathcart, W. G. *et al.* (2006). *Learning mathematics in elementary and middle schools: a learner-centered approach*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Feldhausen, J. and Willard-Holt, W. (1993). Gender differences in classroom interventions and career aspirations of gifted students. *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 18 (July 1993): 355-62. Cited in Fox, L. H. & Soller, J. F. (2001). Psychosocial dimensions of gender differences in mathematics. In W. Secada *et al.* (eds.), *Changing faces of mathematics: perspectives on gender* (pp. 9-24). Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.
- Fox, L. H. & Soller, J. F. (2001). Psychosocial dimensions of gender differences in mathematics. In W. Secada *et al.* (eds.), *Changing faces of mathematics: perspectives on gender* (pp. 9-24). Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.
- Gurian, M. (1997). *The wonder of boys*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin.
- Gurian, M. (2001). *Boys and girls learn differently*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Gurian, M. (2002). *The wonder of girls*. New York: Atria Books.
- Gurian, M. & Annis, B. (2008). *Leadership and the sexes*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Leder, G. (1990). Gender and classroom practice. In L. Burton (ed.), *Gender and mathematics* (pp. 9-19). London: Cassell Educational. Cited in Fox, L. H. & Soller, J. F. (2001). Psychosocial dimensions of gender differences in mathematics. In W. Secada *et al.* (eds.), *Changing faces of mathematics: perspectives on gender* (pp. 9-24). Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.
- Sadker, M. & Sadker, G. (1994). *Failing at fairness: how America's schools cheat girls*. New York: Charles Schribner's. Cited in Fox, L. H. & Soller, J. F. (2001). Psychosocial dimensions of gender differences in mathematics. In W. Secada *et al.* (eds.), *Changing faces of mathematics: perspectives on gender* (pp. 9-24). Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.
- Sempera, A. & Hovis, M. (1990). *Math: a four-letter word*. Wimberley, TX: Wimberley Press.

Jane Buerger serves as Professor of Mathematics, Concordia University Chicago. She may be contacted at jane.buerger@cuchicago.edu.

DCE Expressions ... Running in Place

by Kevin Hall

Singular focus—that's what it takes to finish a long race. Not all that long ago I called myself a runner. To help keep the motivation high I would run in a handful of races spread throughout the year. The races required intentional training, planning, and daily discipline. Injuries, at times brutal Minnesota weather, and a full schedule made the daily choice to abandon a planned run an alluring temptation. However, knowing that each daily run was an essential part of the process of completing and enjoying the long race ahead helped keep me going. So what keeps you going on your long race?

In my ministry, as well as in my running, I find myself wrestling with both external and internal obstacles. I believe the ministry race we are all running now offers a number of growing obstacles and opportunities. Declining numbers are a continual concern within our church body whether measuring congregational membership, worship attendance or the number of calling congregations for Commissioned workers. Closer to home, the number of church work students enrolled within our higher education system continues to lag.

Within our own congregations recessionary times tend to focus attention on limitations rather than on possibilities. Unemployment, recession, debt, and layoffs have moved from abstract macroeconomic concepts to the harsh realities of lost positions, reduced funding and lost homes. While the larger economy appears to be on the mend, I believe our congregations will continue to experience rough economic times for at least the next year or so (I can make vague economic predictions with the best of them). Anxiety and apprehension seem to be constant companions in our shared race.

So what keeps us going in this race? To me, that's where the internal challenges come in to play. Borrowing from Dr. Luther—what does this mean? More personally, what does all of this mean for me and what do I do about it? Certainly, one human response is to experience our own personal share of anxiety and even fear. Let's all own that one and consider some additional responses.

For me, these challenges bring me back to the core of why I am in DCE ministry to begin with. As a new person in Christ, washed in my baptism, I am held by the Father—empowered and shaped by the Holy Spirit and called. It is a nice theological thought, and a reality that shapes my thoughts and responses to all of the systemic instability in my world. But what does that mean for us as DCEs?

One clarion thought for me, especially in times like these, is to be a “nonanxious” leader grounded in the reassuring Grace of God. This is a bit like the (former) runner in me remembering to pace myself through the long race. Hebrews 12: 1–2 offers some nonanxious encouragement:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The parallels to running here, for me, are strong. The runner needs to rely on training, experience, and the encouragement of others—even when he or she doesn’t feel like it. So too, we have the opportunity to rely on God’s Word, the blessings of the Confessions and, of course, squarely on our abiding God—even when we don’t feel like it. Reflective personal devotion and contemplative prayer just might be a wonderful place to be.

I believe these are also times for a renewed commitment to core issues and intentionality. So often we confuse our means and ends. In our DCE world this often means getting a bit muddled over why we do particular events or activities. These are not times for muddled and unfocused thinking. Do our programs, events, and activities truly help us meet our ministry’s mission? Do the means (the things we do) help us meet our ends (for example the congregation’s mission or the agreed-upon outcomes of the Education Committee)?

Richard Osmer (1990), professor of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary, makes the strong case in his book, *A Teachable Spirit*, that the role of those who serve in the teaching office of the Church is threefold:

Determination of Normative Beliefs and Practices of the Church

Contextualization and Reinterpretation

Forming the Means of Education

As Lutheran educators, and friends of none other than Dr. Luther,

himself, we stand firmly on the first of these, God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions. But what of the remaining two roles? Here we struggle a bit with the tensions of tradition, policy, expectations, and the safe harbor of the familiar. If we are to excel and enjoy our ministry "run", we need to wrestle with these last two questions. Certainly the Word does not change—but how (the means of education) we respond to the real struggles and joys of our community's members (the context) makes all the difference in this world of accountability and limitations.

Hopefully my running days are not over. There is something delightfully head-clearing about a brisk run on a cool (define that as you will) Minnesota morning. I pray your "ministry run" continues to be a head-clearing celebration of God's Grace in your life and the lives you touch. May God hold you close as we run this race together. **LEJ**

References:

Osmer, R. (1990). *A teachable spirit: Recovering the teaching office in the church*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.

Kevin Hall, serves as the Director of the DCE program at Concordia University, St. Paul, MN. A certified DCE with 23 years of experience in the field, Kevin is currently pursuing a doctorate in educational leadership from the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul.

Administrative Talk ... Real Work

by Glen Kuck

Henry David Thoreau once mused, “It’s not enough to be busy. The question is: what are we busy about?”

Schools are filled with busy people—students, teachers, and administrators are all busy throughout the day. But what are they busy about?

First, some statistics about workers in general: An average adult American worker today needs to work only 11 hours to produce as much as one working 40 hours per week in 1950. However, 87% of workers are not satisfied with the results of their work, and 53% of workers think that the work they do doesn’t count for anything. Additionally, 54% of all workers feel they have more creativity, resourcefulness, talent, and intelligence than their job requires or allows (Peterson et al, 2009, pp. 11, 18-19).

The above, from the book *Fake Work* by Brent Peterson and Gaylan Nielson, is filled with stories from workers, mostly from the business world, who are disillusioned by the meaninglessness of their work. While it is hoped that there is less disenchantment among teachers than the workforce in general, that may not be the case. Some of the complaints voiced by workers from the business world could just as well come from the mouths of teachers and staffs. They include having to attend meetings that have no clear purpose and are wastes of time for the participants, being assigned projects that take much time and effort but then die due to lack of interest, failure on the part of managers to plan how a project will be implemented, and having to produce excessive amounts of paperwork for no apparent reason. (p. 14)

The authors suggest some steps that can be taken by managers to make the work of employees more meaningful. They apply to principals of schools as well.

Among them is the importance of leaders making sure the workers understand how their jobs fit into the overall mission of the company. A second is to make sure meetings are focused, concise, and held only when needed. As one of the workers in the book said, “A meeting has to

be really, really good to beat no meeting at all” (p. 99).

A third is to empower workers with the responsibility of making decisions and solving problems (p. 177).

Lastly, leaders must follow through when plans are made. Managers who are good at follow-through and empowerment foster teams that are more efficient, self-reliant, and productive than managers who don't (p. 194).

Adult workers can feel good about their work, but it takes consistent, intelligent efforts of leaders to make it happen.

Well, so much for the adults, but how about the largest group of workers within a school, the students? How do they feel about their work?

William Glasser (1992) points out in his book *The Quality School—Managing Students Without Coercion* that most students are not pleased with the work they are asked to do in school. This is often not because they feel they are given too much work but because of the lack of quality of the work they are given. He notes that students will not work hard unless they feel there is quality in what they are asked to do.

Glasser writes on behalf children when he states, “Working hard will not satisfy our need for power when we are engaged in doing what we believe is a low-quality task: Busy work, for example, is the epitome of low-quality schoolwork.” He goes on to note, “More than almost any workplace, school, with its many compulsory academic subjects, suffers from its inability to project an image of quality to the work the workers are asked to do” (pp. 89-90).

If Glasser's assessment is correct, what can principals and teachers do to bring about quality and engage students in meaningful, productive work?

Obviously, students need to see the value of what they are doing. Part of the solution lies in creating a school climate that eliminates adversarial relationships that can exist between students and faculty. Students enjoy learning and working more when they know the teachers and principal are on their side. An atmosphere that engenders positive feedback is far more productive than one laden with criticism. This is true when dealing with relationships between students, teachers, principals, or any combination thereof.

When teachers or administrators do a good job of conveying to a student that they feel the student is doing well, the student is more motivated to excel. However, when students do well at some particular project, it's probably better to compliment them for their effort and

the time they put into the project than to compliment them for their intelligence. In the latter case, it may lead children to think that since they are intelligent, they won't have to put much effort into future projects.

Students need to be given the chance to share their discoveries through their oral presentations and through their writing with peer audiences that are receptive and supportive of them.

It makes sense that students learn to work in teams, since so much of the adult work world involves working as part of a team. Working only in isolation may make it more difficult for students to see their work as anything but busy work.

Teachers need to be consistent in giving meaningful homework assignments that make a child feel good about what is being learned and that avoids the feeling of busywork. Further, an atmosphere that stresses the importance of studying for the sake of learning and de-emphasizes studying for the sake of passing tests helps students sense the quality of the work in which they are engaged.

Quality is contagious. It engenders a greater desire to achieve it on newer levels. That's true for students, teachers, and principals alike.

The ideal is to have students learn in an atmosphere that doesn't seem like work at all, but rather is an enjoyable experience. It's the primary goal of teachers—to lay the groundwork for a lifetime of self-motivated learning. **LEJ**

References:

Glasser, William. *The Quality School – Managing Students Without Coercion* (1992). New York: HarperCollins Publishers

Peterson, Brent D. and Gaylan W. Nielson. *Fake Work* (2008). New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc.

Glen Kuck serves as principal of St. Paul Lutheran School in Chicago. He may be contacted at gkuck@gmail.com.

Today's Lutheran Educator ... A Time for Transition

by Jonathan Laabs

Today's Lutheran educator is called to ministry in a time of transition. It doesn't take much to notice that change abounds. We are required as God servants to react to the conditions that change around us, but also to prepare wisely for those changes that are yet unseen. In order to be best prepared for our roles as Lutheran educators, we explore new directions, practice new methods, and identify new means of organizing ourselves to carry out God's Great Commission.

Our experiences in the world would suggest that when something isn't working as well as it should—and to enhance effectiveness—we seek new solutions. New leaders are chosen through election in response to a desire of the voters to move in a new direction. Corporate structures are shifted to improve sales. Through research and experience in the field of education, new resources are created, standards are revised, and professional educators are re-tooled to meet the new challenges. The transition to new structures, new methods and new ways of thinking is often not easy and requires the willingness to adapt from current comfort to improvement for the common good.

The Church is not exempt from the need to make transitions in order to be more effective and efficient. Though its mission is, indeed, based upon a much more significant purpose—God's mission—the human organization of the church has needed to shift its structure and governance models many times over the years to best accomplish what it was first organized to do. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) was founded in 1847 around 14 congregations who sought a better means of carrying out their individual missions by banding together. Since that time, the LCMS has re-organized regularly to better serve its growing population and number of churches worldwide (currently over 6100) and to partner with other church bodies and organizations who share in its desire to spread God's saving Word to all nations. Christian education has been a significant focus of attention during every one of those years and has been the basis of ministry for all who have

served as Lutheran educators in many capacities.

Through the work of The Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod Structure and Governance since they were first appointed in 2005, an extensive and fresh approach has been taken at many levels to make a transition into the next phase of organizational development. The Task Force is to be applauded for its effort to raise new questions, explore new models, and actively engage leaders, church workers, and laity in discussion and planning for more effective ministry. Especially significant for those who are called as Ministers of Religion—Commissioned is the potential for a system that allows them to vote after decades of failure at Synodical conventions to make that transition. New possibilities are in front of us. The decision about any changes will be made at the regular convention of the LCMS in summer of 2010. The outcomes are at this point unknown, but the opportunity for transition into a new future is bright.

One final transition that now faces all *Lutheran Education Journal* readers is the move from a print format to electronic, which begins with the next issue. While most of us have experienced the familiar look and feel of the paper version of the *Journal* for many (not all) of the 142 year history of the publication, I am excited about the move to a fresh format that will make the use of the *Journal* even more dynamic. With an online presence, the readership can move to global proportions. New ways of organizing content and the *interactive* opportunities that come with such a change will move the *LEJ* into types of application. Lutheran educators at all levels will have increased access to resources and be able to utilize the power of the Internet for professional growth. Lutheran Education Association will provide customized supplemental resources for its members, including interactive dialog with authors, links to related web sites, and the unique perspectives it has offered as a professional organization for the past 68 years.

Many of us will undoubtedly miss the recognizable format and design of the print version of the *Lutheran Education Journal*. As an organization, LEA has enjoyed a special partnership with Concordia University Chicago, serving as the primary “delivery system” of *LEJ* for almost seven decades and playing a role in its overall content and design. The *Journal* has been a meaningful part of the professional Lutheran educator’s growth and development. The exciting news is that this transition of format is also a transition into an even more relevant tool for the ministry of the today’s (and tomorrow’s) Lutheran educator. THANKS, Concordia, for the last 142 years of *Lutheran Education*

Journal. We look forward to the next 142 years of transitions with great anticipation and renew our commitment to a partnership that has made our ministry together so blessed. **LEJ**

Jonathan C. Laabs, Ed.D. *is the Executive Director of the Lutheran Education Association. He may be contacted at laabsjc@lea.org.*

Multiplying Ministries ... An Encouraging Word!

by Rich Bimler

Remember the old joke about the deer and the antelope talking one day in the field and the deer says to his furry friend, “I think I just heard a discouraging word?”

Hear any discouraging words today? Me too. Unlike that classic line, “Where seldom is heard a discouraging word and the skies are not cloudy all day” we seem to live in a culture that is immersed in discouragement, fear, threats, and all sorts of clouds around us. As one of my “favorite” coffee mugs states, “Life is hard and then you die.”

As I struggle with my own worries, woes, and wars, I continue to be amazed at how my attitude and mindset are changed by the people around me who are models of encouragement. I am struck at how a friendly “Hi” can change my mood, and how a smile and a “Thank You” can turn my day from a Good Friday day to an Easter Resurrection day. As Lutheran educators, we know that God’s Word is the Real Encourager for all of us, and isn’t it amazing how His Word becomes real to us in the people, young and old, that He has placed around us?

Try this experiment: Make a list of all the words and actions from others that encourage you today. Write them down and sense how they change your attitude towards life and towards yourself. Make another list of the times that you encourage someone else today by words and actions. Go ahead, forget for a moment your Lutheran humility and actually celebrate how you brought hope and encouragement to people today. I strongly encourage you to do this regularly, at least in your mind, and watch how your own attitude becomes more and more positive and upbeat.

I am convinced that a major ingredient in a healthy congregation and in a healthy school and in a healthy staff and in a healthy classroom and in a healthy family is *encouragement* of one another. Throughout the scriptures, the Lord continues to encourage, encourage, encourage us and affirms that we are the people of God in Christ Jesus. St. Paul encourages us by pointing to the Cross and the Resurrection. What a model of encouragement.

Listen to a few of His Words:

- "...Encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing." (1 Thess. 5:11)
- "...I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love..." (Philemon 1:7)
- "...and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15:4)
- "...I have sent him to you for this very purpose so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts..." (Colossians 4:8)

And on and on and on. I certainly do not hear many discouraging words here.

Author William Arthur said it well when he wrote:

Flatter me...and I may not believe you;
Criticize me...and I may not like you;
Ignore me...and I may not forgive you;
Encourage me...and I may not forget you.

Think for a moment about those people in your life who encourage you. Name them. Thank them in person if you can; thank God if you can't. The word, "encouragement" means "from the heart." Encouragement happens when we have heart-to-heart connections, beginning with the Lord. As one wise educator told me once, "The three greatest gifts we can give to someone are: encouragement, encouragement, and encouragement." How encouraging.

I have a button in my office that reads, "I was caught doing something right." (I must admit that no one gave this button to me but, instead, I had to buy it.) It really captures the essence of what Encouragement is all about ...affirming, supporting, cheering people on, pointing them to the Hope that is ours in Jesus Christ.

So hop on the Barnabas bandwagon and share your gift of encouragement as sons and daughters of the Lord. Here are Eight Encouraging Experiences to help you on your journey of joy:

Eight Encouraging Experiences:

1. Show genuine interest in people of all ages.
2. Listen to people, hopefully with both ears!
3. Acknowledge what is important in people's lives.
4. Say "Well Done" and "Thanks" as often as possible.
5. Ask for advice.
6. Offer specific help and support to people.
7. Call or e-mail someone every day, just to say "Hi" and "I'm

thinking of you.”

8. Search the Scriptures daily to see and sense and celebrate the Lord’s encouragement to each of us, as His forgiven “Encouragers.”

May you “seldom hear a discouraging word” this day and, even when you do, may the Hope and Promise of Christ overwhelm you with His love and Encouragement!

Encouragement is contagious...Let’s all pray for an epidemic. **LEJ**

Dr. Richard Bimler *is past president of Wheat Ridge Ministries and Ambassador of Health, Hope, and Aging for Lutheran Life Communities. He may be contacted at rich@wheatridge.org.*
